# Retreat Conferences

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# RETREAT CONFERENCES FOR CONVENTS.

# RETREAT CONFERENCES FOR CONVENTS,

BEING

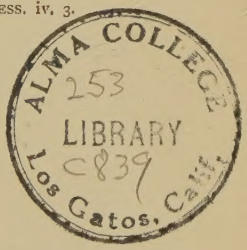
## A Series of Exhortations addressed to Religious.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES COX,
OBLATE OF MARY IMMACULATE

'This is the will of God, your sanctification.'
1 THESS. iv. 3.

SECOND SERIES.

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Laudetur Jesus Christus,
Et Maria Immaculata.

## PERMISSION TO PUBLISH.

FATHER CHARLES COX, of our Congregation, has the permission of his Superiors to publish a Second Series of 'Retreat Conferences for Convents,' written by him.

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*Provincial of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.*

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To

ENGLISH-SPEAKING RELIGIOUS

WHO, BEING CONSECRATED TO GOD,

LABOUR WITH MUCH DEVOTEDNESS IN MANY LANDS

FOR HIS GLORY,

THIS BOOK OF EXHORTATIONS

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR.

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# RETREAT CONFERENCES FOR CONVENTS.

## FIRST EVENING.

### I.

*OPENING DISCOURSE.—THE RETREAT.*

'I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me: for He will speak peace unto His people: and unto His saints: and unto them that are converted to the heart.'—Ps. lxxxiv. 9.

You should be happy to enter into this retreat, for in it God will open to you the treasury of special graces, that you may draw therefrom according to your needs; and He will, as is His wont, even bestow upon you richer favours than those which you will pray for. Listen to Him addressing Himself to you by His prophet: 'All you that thirst, come to the waters: and you that have no money make haste, buy and eat: come ye, buy wine and milk without money, and without any price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which doth not satisfy you? Hearken

diligently to Me, and eat that which is good, and your soul shall be delighted in fatness. Incline your ear and come to Me: hear, and your soul shall live' (Isa. lv. 1-3). If these words of God from the Old Testament fill you with confidence and consolation, these other words of the New Testament pronounced by our Divine Lord should do so not less: 'Come to Me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you' (St. Matt. xi. 28). Now are these invitations realized.

Another year has passed since you made your last annual retreat. You have, as it were, reached another stage of your journey through the dreary waste of this life, and you rest awhile in the oasis of this retreat before starting again with fresh energy upon your way—the way of religious perfection. The past year has been, as it were, another day of battle in the anxious campaign waged against the enemies of your salvation; and now is a temporary lull, in which you gather together your forces and strengthen the weak points, with a view to renew the contest with energy and confidence on the morrow. The past year has been, as it were, another day of labour and worry, and this retreat is the peaceful eventide when the noisy bustle is hushed, and in the mellow light of the setting sun you contemplate the work done, examine if well or ill done, and plan out the work for another day. But how important to advance in the path of perfection, to fight successfully your enemies, and to accomplish the works intrusted to you! Be convinced that everything depends upon it.

Perhaps the real issue has been obscured from view by the dust of the road, the turmoil of the fight, or the bustle of the work. Perhaps you have been deceived as to the real issue, or your attention has been diverted from it; or you have been injured by the callousness of unthinking worldly persons, by the defect of charity and religion in this age, by the sloth of nature, by the strength of various passions, by the disedification given by others, or by the snares of Satan. Perhaps while preserving, nourishing, and comforting the body, and recreating the mind, you have not given as much attention to your soul. Perhaps you have lived rather as children of nature than as children of grace, or as only children of men, and not as adopted children of God made heirs to the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps, again, while devoting yourselves with excessive energy to others, you have neglected yourselves. Or perhaps, finally, you have lived rather as seculars than as devout religious, because you have not paid attention to the real issue before you, or have not adequately realized the holy character of your calling. Alas if it has been so! But even if it has so been, now God calls you to enter into yourselves, to study your short-comings, to repent of your sins, to amend your lives, and to give yourselves generously in your future life to the effort to reach the perfection of your vocation.

As the grace of this retreat, just like every other grace, is from God, be persuaded that God now calls you to say something to you in it. He wishes to arrest your attention, to give you some special light

or lesson, to move your hearts, to encourage you, and to console you. For these ends does He bring you away from your daily duties, from contact with the world, and invite you to make a good retreat. Appreciate, then, this gracious call, and respond to it. 'I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me: for He will speak peace unto His people: and unto His saints: and unto them that are converted to the heart.' His gracious message, His words of peace, are for the just and for the truly penitent, provided that they listen.

It is sad to record that sometimes the annual retreat of religious is badly made—made with dispositions which render its success doubtful. Some religious enter into retreat under compulsion, with the result that they do not concentrate their attention upon it: they leave their hearts outside. Others assist at the retreat with a view to its being a time of rest, and of freedom from the demands upon their energies usual in their ordinary duties; they do not realize its importance, and do not open their hearts fully to its graces. Some, too, there are who make the retreat automatically or mechanically. They would not like to omit it; they will be able to say that they have made it; but the even way of their callous spirituality continues the same after their retreat as before it. Others, again, there are who lose half of the benefit of the retreat, because they apply the teaching of the instructions to others instead of to themselves, or because they listen to the instructions out of curiosity, if not also with a critical spirit. There have even been religious of

whom it is sad to think. They sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, inasmuch as they were evil-minded and in sin, and they did not wish to be converted—they wished to be left as they were; and their retreat, through their impenitence, became a grace neglected or abused, to bring upon them a graver condemnation. Happily, such religious are seldom met with; there are none in this edifying community.

I have suggested that possibly, from one cause or another, the real issue before you in the religious life to which you have been called may have been obscured or unheeded. What is the issue before you? Under what responsibility do you pass your lives? You have not lived so long without having become convinced that some vital issue is before you, and that you are under some grave responsibility. You know that the traveller pushes on towards his destination, that the soldier fights for victory, that the labourer must finish his task. And you? You, religious consecrated to God; you, chosen servants of the Most High—have you no special issue before you? Are there no grave obligations under which you lie, and which you would neglect at your peril? The lesson which dawned upon your mind when it was first able to grasp religious truth, and which became clearer to you as your mind developed and was further exercised in faith, was that time has issue in eternity, that your temporal and mortal life has issue in one that will be immortal, and that grace has issue in everlasting glory; and, on the other hand, that sin is an unmitigated evil which will, if unforgiven,

have issue in separation from God, in eternal death and everlasting punishment. Eternal, then, are all these issues. Every one of you will come at death face to face with the eternal issue in her own case. But you will not wait till that decisive hour to study and examine how you stand with regard to the issue of your lives; to see if they afford assurance of a happy issue, if their tenor is in keeping with such an issue; to make certain that nothing is being done that would compromise or imperil it, and that nothing is being neglected which is necessary to assure it. No; you recognise that to postpone your anxiety and your examination till that decisive hour would be the extreme of folly. When, then, will you make this desirable study and examination? Need I advise you, need I supplicate you, need I warn you? Now, during this present retreat, is the time to weigh your dispositions and conduct, and to see how you stand with regard to the issue of your lives. Now is the time to examine if your manner of life corresponds with the manifold obligations of your calling.

To bring yourselves more earnestly to fulfil this duty of the retreat, persuade yourselves that God Himself invites you to this examination, as He did the people of Jerusalem by His prophet Jeremias, when, alas! they would not heed His voice, and were therefore subjected to terrible punishment. 'Thus saith the Lord: Stand ye on the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, which is the good way, and walk ye in it; and you shall find refreshment for your souls. And they said: We will not walk' (Jer. vi. 16).

Examine how it comes to pass that, encompassed as you are by such powerful aids to holiness, and occupied as you are in works of charity and religion, you are perhaps yet so mundane, so imperfect in virtue, and even in some respects disedifying. Ask yourselves, if need be, why, after so many years spent in religion, you have reason to believe yourselves so little religious in spirit and character, in speech, and in action. Ask yourselves how it has come to pass that, surrounded by so many opportunities of doing good, you have perhaps done so little. Has, in your case, too, that happened of which we read in the prophet Aggeus: 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Set your hearts to consider your ways; you have sowed much and brought in little?' (i. 5, 6). If these words have application, how comes it that you have brought in but little? Has there been any falling away in true religiousness? This would account for it. Has the brightness of the faith of the days of your innocence faded somewhat or diminished, owing to the mist of worldly ideas? Has the pious fervour of your early life been affected by remissness or sin? Has your edifying readiness to follow in the path of duty given place to callousness and tepidity? Has there been a growth rather of unwarrantable independence in views and conduct than of humility and obedience? Is there an increased tendency to relaxation in matters of poverty, religious union, exactitude, and observance? Do you find control more irksome, and do you look with less favour, not to say on the very existence of any authority over you, on the exercise of any? If so, what is all this an indica-

tion of, if not of a falling away? If this falling away has been serious, what traces has it left? It cannot but have left its impression on your religious character, lessened your merit in the sight of God, and weakened your effectiveness for good. Let grace now speak to your hearts to lead you 'to consider your ways.' 'Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which doth not satisfy you?' What a blessing it will be if now, in this retreat, by self-examination you come to detect this falling away, and if you, without delay, take steps to stay its further progress! Oh, what a sense of satisfaction you will experience at the end of the retreat if you feel confident that you have turned again with steady purpose into the path of true religiousness and fervour, and with what thankfulness you will afterwards look back to this retreat which will have been to you a season of so much grace!

Your falling away may have been not only detrimental to your own religious progress; it may also have injured others. Hence the necessity, in your examination, of considering the influence of your conduct upon others. You may have injured others either by disedification or by neglect. A religious who disregards discipline, and is unfaithful in the observance of her rule, becomes a cause of scandal, if not actually a stumbling-block, to others. Her conduct affects the general well-being of the community; it is as a chilly breeze blowing across a garden of blossoming flowers; it is as a note of discord in the harmony of piety and religious observance; it is as a wheel out of place in the machinery which

is doing God's work. The disedification which this religious gives may lessen the respect of others for points of the rule, and may prove to be the first unloosening of the bonds of discipline and charity. True lovers of Christ and His Cross would have no part in bringing about what may in time result so disastrously.

A religious whose duties lie in labouring for the good of others, by teaching or in other ways, may injure her neighbour by neglect—that is, by being unfaithful, either in work or in devotedness, in accomplishing those duties. God requires her to fulfil them conscientiously—in other words, exactly and fully—in order to achieve the end in view as perfectly as possible. But if she neglects them, or makes only a half-hearted effort to accomplish them, she may offend against justice or charity, as well as against dutifulness and obedience, since the objects of her charge will suffer in some way owing to her neglect. A fervent religious would view her duties to others in the light of God's love and will; both claim at her hands a faithful service which will offer to God a pleasing sacrifice, and result in benefit as well to the religious herself as to those for whose good she labours.

After these reflections you cannot but be convinced that there is indeed for examination abundance of matter having vital issue. It is to be hoped that the result of the examination may be satisfactory, and even comforting, to your minds. Do not deceive yourselves about the importance of making it, and, that it may be profitable, do not shirk any correction

or amendment which it may point out as desirable. Strive to entertain a zeal for your spiritual well-being; enter into the sentiments of holy David, expressed in these words of his: 'Let my heart be undefiled in Thy justifications, that I may not be confounded' (Ps. cxviii. 80); in other words, Let my life be irreproachable, lest I be lost. How clearly these words put the issue before you!

Consider now that the time of the retreat should be one of conversion. Let your first conversion be to the light, to knowledge; your second, to amendment, resulting from what the light discovers to you; and your third, conversion to a more perfect way.

The Book of Proverbs tells us who they are who neglect to correspond with graces such as these. 'Fools,' it says, 'despise wisdom and instruction' (i. 7). It also tells of the evil which those who disregard God's voice, His lessons, and His warnings, bring upon themselves: 'You have despised all My counsel, and have neglected My reprehensions: I also will laugh at your destruction' (i. 25, 26). God will instruct you during the course of the retreat; He may throw light upon what has hitherto been obscured. 'I will lead the blind,' He says by His prophet, 'into the way which they know not; and in the paths which they were ignorant of I will make them walk; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight' (Isa. xlii. 16). This grace is for those who wish to have the darkness chased from their minds; entertain, then, an ardent desire for the light of God's instruction, and open your minds to receive it. 'The declaration of Thy

words,' said David, 'giveth light' (Ps. cxviii. 130). Light will manifest itself in your meditations, in the pious books which you will read, in the conferences at which you will assist, and in the examinations which you will make. The result should be that you will arrive at a more perfect understanding of the line of conduct which you should pursue, and of the will of God in your regard. 'The fruit of the light,' as St. Paul says, 'is in all goodness, and justice, and truth' (Eph. v. 9). Be ready to welcome the light, and say in your hearts: 'I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me.' Be, moreover, ready to walk in the way which its lessons teach, 'because,' as Solomon says, 'the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life' (Prov. vi. 23).

None of you pretend to have so far advanced in the way of perfection as to have nothing to amend. All should be converted to amendment; all should be desirous of applying correction where it is needed. It would be sad if any religious had the thought of leaving the retreat just as she entered into it, with only the same dispositions, and, alas! with the same faults. Only the Evil Spirit could inspire such a thought. You all spurn such a suggestion with horror as being unworthy of you; then, happily, you intend amendment. The light will most probably disclose some points in which you have not entered into the spirit of your rule, some neglect in correcting your faults, or some affection towards venial sin in various matters; but it will certainly lead you to see clearly the important issue which is before you, the

requirements of your state, and the necessity of fervour and religious devotedness in your lives. Say, then, in a spirit of docile attention: 'I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me.' Not only are you prepared to listen, but you will note what is said; you will attend to the inspirations which you receive; you will apply the lessons inculcated; you will correct and amend; you will strive to root out the evil, no matter what it may cost you. Without this generous resolve, your retreat will fail in fruitfulness.

But you have yet a further step to take; the retreat grace will help you to take it. The Holy Scriptures tell us that 'the path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forwards and increaseth even to perfect day' (Prov. iv. 18). God says to you: 'The paths of perfection are open to you; advance!' You do well to amend what needs correction, but a retreat well made should expand your holy desires and carry you forward. You hear the voice of our Lord saying to you: 'Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect' (St. Matt. v. 48); you recognise, perhaps, that you have made but little progress, that you are far from being perfect. In this retreat you will excite your desires, you will wish to be more perfect than you are—more perfect in your religious dispositions, in your aims and resolves, in your patience and self-immolation, in your exterior conduct and dutifulness, and in your correspondence with God's designs in you. Only strive to become thus more perfect—that is the least you can do; and, moreover, pray earnestly for the grace necessary to become so. The desire, the

effort and the prayer are, with God's grace, possible to you. Strive, then, for this third conversion—a conversion to the more perfect way.

Endeavour, by God's grace, which will not be denied you, to dispose yourselves to enter with these good resolutions into the retreat, and you may be sure that it will be a fruitful one. How effectively you should feel yourselves moved to correspond with the grace of the retreat when you reflect upon God's unspeakable goodness in offering you so powerful a help to your amendment and sanctification, and upon His desire of your perfection! Impressed by this reflection, you feel led to exclaim with David: 'What is man that Thou art mindful of him?' (Ps. viii. 5.) Shall God be mindful of you, and will you be unmindful of Him? Will you be heedless of His voice when it is one of admonition, of encouragement in pursuing your vocation, and of invitation to a life more in keeping with your obligation of tending to perfection? No; you will enter fervently into the retreat, for the grace of it, like the seed spoken of in the parable, will produce fruit a hundred-fold if only it fall upon the good ground—that is, upon the soul earnestly desirous of profiting by it, and disposed by humility and piety to correspond with it. Say, then: Yes, 'I will hear'; I wish to listen to God's lessons and inspirations; I will not deny Him anything He may deign to ask of me, no matter what it may cost me; I know that all He wishes and asks of me will be for my good, and will tend to my peace, consolation, sanctification and salvation. I will not resist Him, I will not oppose what is for

my own welfare. 'I will hear what the Lord will speak in me: for He will speak peace unto His people: and unto His saints: and unto them that are converted to the heart.'

From this preliminary instruction take three points for your meditation to-morrow morning.

The first, that during this retreat you, as it were, draw near to God at His gracious invitation, to reflect upon the great issue before you, and upon your responsibilities in regard of it.

The second, that during this retreat you are expected to make a serious examination of your whole conduct—that is, in relation to your own souls, and as to your works for others. Wisdom, prudence, and self-interest require that you should make this examination, and that you should not hide your true state from yourselves.

The third point of your meditation should be that during this retreat you ought to correspond with the grace of God moving you to the three conversions which we have considered: conversion to a clearer understanding and higher appreciation of your duty, conversion to amendment where needed, and conversion to a more earnest effort in the path of perfection.

When you have dwelt carefully and piously upon these points, you will be convinced that you have a serious work to do during the retreat, that you should therefore give your full attention to it, and that, with God's blessing, happy results should follow. Conviction only prepares the way for accomplishing anything; there are also needed purpose and effort.

When, therefore, you have become convinced of the benefit of making the annual retreat, do not stand haltingly on the threshold of so great a gain, but purpose to pursue it. Desire so to make the retreat that you may gather the valuable fruits which a retreat well made yields. Then arouse yourselves to make the necessary effort. God will give you these fruits if you strive to acquire them. 'Seek, and you shall find' (St. Matt. vii. 7).

To further the work of the retreat, practise silence and recollection, and give your minds to prayer; commune with God and with your own souls. Turn often to the Sacred Heart of your Lord as to the fountain of all graces; and invoke again and again the intercession of your heavenly Mother and Protectress; ask also your Guardian Angel and your holy Patrons to help you, that this retreat, which may be the last you will ever make, may be instrumental in procuring for you the grace of such heavenly enlightenment and holy vigour as shall bear you on, with fervour and dutifulness renewed, to that blessedness of eternal rest and glory which is no other than the happy issue for which you are struggling, and the bright goal of your souls' desires and hopes.

## FIRST DAY.

### II.

### *GOD'S DESIGNS REGARDING US.*

'Shall not my soul be subject to God? for from Him is my salvation.'—Ps. lxi. 2.

All men have their place in God's designs, and their happiness depends upon their correspondence with these designs. There was nothing fortuitous in man's creation; there will be nothing fortuitous in his salvation. It would perplex you to try to divine the special place in God's designs of many men and women whom you know, and without whom you may think the world could do very well; but the world in every age is full of such, and God has designs regarding all. It is not for you to search into plans which are inscrutable. You may, however, by many indications, discern in your own case enough to enable you to know your duty in respect of God's arrangements; and your happiness will depend upon your falling in with these arrangements, and upon the dutiful spirit in which you do so. Such falling in with God's arrangements in a dutiful

spirit is a worship which every creature owes to his Creator.

This subject of God's designs in your regard ought to impress you with sentiments of gratitude and confidence, and inspire you with fervour and dutifulness. When you reflect upon your own baseness, you are filled with wonder that God has any regard even to your existence; but when you consider that God brought you out of nothing and gave you being, you feel that you have some claim upon Him as being His creature, entirely dependent on Him for all you need in the orders of nature and grace. You have absolutely nothing of your own upon which to maintain life or to direct your course, for, as St. Paul says, 'We brought nothing into this world; and certainly we can carry nothing out' (1 Tim. vi. 7); but of necessity you look up to God for all things.

We will consider the general character which is found stamped upon God's designs, and then make some reflections upon the principal relations which God has deigned to enter into with His creatures.

You should be impressed with sentiments of admiration, gratitude, and confidence when you consider that God's designs are just, wise, perfect, beneficent, and inscrutable.

The perfections of God are not circumscribed or limited by the powers of the mind of man to measure them or understand them. Produce the man of the greatest mental power, and ask him to picture for you in the fullest terms what he can conceive of greatness, power, goodness, and wisdom consistent with unimpeachable holiness; and his description,

like his conception, will fall infinitely short of what these attributes are in God. The attributes or perfections of God are such that they admit of no possible limitation, just as they admit of no possible fault or deficiency. They are infinite, and therefore beyond man's full comprehension. When you come to where the waves of the ocean break upon the shore, you look out with admiration on the apparently limitless expanse of water, but you do not see the whole ocean—you cannot. Yet it has its limits. You admire the Divine attributes where you see them displayed, but you see them, as it were, only from the shore. You cannot grasp more than an idea of them; they are infinite. They are displayed in all God's designs and works.

God's designs in your regard are infinitely just. With what trust, then, you should confide yourself to all His arrangements! Moses in his canticle declared: 'The works of God are perfect, and all His ways are judgments; God is faithful. . . . He is just and right' (Deut. xxxii. 4). The most perfect judgment, which cannot admit of error, and which weighs every possible consideration of cause and effect, of past, present, and future, is exercised (if we may so say) in all God's arrangements. He is infinitely just in creating, preserving, providing for, trying, tolerating, rewarding, and — where justice demands it—in punishing, all His creatures; and His justice is as adorable on earth, in purgatory, and in hell, as it is in heaven. No creature, great or small, is lost sight of, and God's justice is displayed in the case of all. Our Lord Himself assures

you of this where He says: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered' (St. Matt. x. 29, 30). These considerations ought to calm your minds and fill you with confidence, especially when adverse circumstances arise causing you anxiety, suffering, or sorrow. Do not necessarily expect in such circumstances that God will remove the trial, but believe that it is for your good, and that it is measured out to you with the most perfect justice. Where there is injustice, it is of the creature, and God remains infinitely just in bearing with it.

There is, in the second place, in all God's designs the exercise of an infinite wisdom. The Holy Ghost makes wisdom say: 'I was set up from eternity. . . . When He prepared the heavens I was present. . . . I was with Him forming all things' (Prov. viii. 23, 27, 30). All human wisdom combined is as a shadow in comparison with the infinite, and therefore incomprehensible, wisdom of God. In God's designs and works we have to admire and adore His wisdom displayed in their conception, creation, adaptation, operation, and completion; but we must remember that often we fail to realize the ways or workings of this Divine wisdom, and that, this being so, we must exercise our faith, which tells us that whether we perceive it or not, God does everything with consummate wisdom. 'How great are Thy works, O Lord?' asks holy David. 'Thou hast made all things in wisdom' (Ps. ciii. 24). The wisdom of God is displayed in countless ways in dealing with

men, even in drawing good out of evil. What could be conceived more disastrous for man than the fall of our first parents in Eden? Yet from this, as an occasion, God has built up for the human race a fabric of untold blessings. How often, in man's checkered career, he is nearest to success when to all appearances his case is hopeless! How wonderful, too, that great works should arise from such unpromising beginnings! How remarkable a case of this kind we see in the spread and triumph of the Church! 'The foolish things of the world,' says St. Paul, 'hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong' (1 Cor. i. 27). In God's hands all instruments, no matter how unsuitable they may seem, serve His designs. How wonderful that, just when the seed, which has been buried in the ground, is on the point of dissolving into rottenness, then it is that the germ of the new plant strikes out from it! Our Lord uses this illustration to convey a valuable lesson in the spiritual order. 'Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal' (St. John xii. 24, 25). How mysterious, then, are the ways of Divine wisdom! It attains its ends through the most unlikely instruments, agencies, and circumstances. These considerations should lead you to embrace with trust the designs of Providence in your regard, no matter

how much may be obscured from your weak scrutiny the heavenly wisdom which controls them.

In the third place, God's designs are infinitely perfect. Nothing is lost sight of by God in His works. The proper means are selected, and are properly adapted to accomplish the end in view. Nothing is ever wanting on God's part to secure the realization of the thing or end designed. 'Great are the works of the Lord,' says David, 'sought out according to all His wills' (Ps. cx. 2). And Solomon says: 'We cannot add anything, nor take away from those things which God hath made that He may be feared' (Eccles. iii. 14). When His designs are for man's welfare, alas! how often man, in his folly and depravity, prevents their accomplishment! When God foretold by Isaias the reprobation of the Jews, He employed a parable, comparing His people to a vineyard. He showed forth all that He had done to perfect the vineyard and make it fruitful. Nothing was wanting on His part, but His people opposed His loving designs; therefore did He say: 'What is there that I ought to do more to My vineyard, that I have not done to it?' (Isa. v. 4). Everything necessary had been amply provided for, but because of the wickedness of the Jews God's designs were frustrated, so He went on to show how He would destroy the vineyard and make it desolate. His work in all that concerns you, too, is perfect. What, for instance, can you declare to be wanting on God's part concerning your religious vocation? Is anything unprovided which is needed for your sanctification? It rests with you, by God's grace,

to correspond with what is so perfectly designed. Be assured that perfection is stamped on all God's works, and that only man's folly causes their failure in his regard.

In the fourth place, God's designs bear the stamp of His beneficence. Remember always that God is a God of infinite goodness. If our Lord conveys by the figure of the good tree bringing forth good fruit, and being unable to bring forth evil fruit, that the virtuous heart yields only fruits of virtue, how much more eminently is this parable applicable to God, the Source of all goodness! Our Lord testified, saying: 'One is good, God' (St. Matt. xix. 17); and St. Paul speaks of 'the riches of His goodness' (Rom. ii. 4), and declares that so good is God in His providence that He turns all things, whether adverse or favourable, to the benefit of His elect. 'To them that love God all things work together unto good' (viii. 28). God's works for man are works of love and mercy. How much is expressed by St. Paul where he says: 'He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?' (viii. 32)! Be assured, then, that all God's designs concerning you are those of His goodness.

Consider, lastly, that God's designs, infinitely just, wise, perfect, and beneficent as they are, are yet inscrutable. Could it be otherwise, seeing that God is an Infinite Being? He says by Isaias: 'As the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are My ways exalted above your ways, and My thoughts above your thoughts' (lv. 9). And St. Paul says:

'How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!' (Rom. xi. 33). Solomon also declares that 'man cannot find out the work, which God hath made, from the beginning to the end' (Eccles. iii. 11). You should therefore, in a spirit of admiration and humility, rejoice that God's greatness is such that you cannot fathom His designs; and you should strenuously repress all irreverent scrutiny, criticism, and complaining when you find yourself surrounded by difficulties or perplexed by the course of events. The designs of God will in due time be worked out and accomplished, even though you may never know in this life precisely what they were. Solomon says: 'I understood that man can find no reason of all those works of God that are done under the sun; and the more he shall labour to seek, so much the less shall he find' (Eccles. viii. 17).

It should be profitable to you to call to mind and study the character stamped upon God's designs, because such a study cannot but conciliate your mind, fill you with trust in God, and lead you to embrace in a peaceful and dutiful spirit His designs in your regard. Opposed to such dutifulness would be the arrogant and irreverent spirit of those who seek first to know and approve of everything designed for them before they willingly acquiesce in its accomplishment. Such as these lose peace of mind, and fail to gain merit; they are, however, powerless to stay the hand of God, or to upset His plans, when it is according to the Divine will that they should be carried out. You, happily, would be sorry

to oppose any of God's designs, for you worship God as your First Beginning and Last End, and you place yourselves entirely at His disposal, recognising His full rights over you, and your entire dependence upon Him.

We come now to consider some of the principal relations which God has deigned to establish with His creatures, and therefore with you. Your faith in His unutterable greatness leads you to exclaim in astonishment at His condescensions: 'What is man that Thou art mindful of him?' (Ps. viii. 5). How wonderfully honoured man is by these relations established by God with him! how great man's dignity becomes through them! What do we find? God, as Creator, makes man according to His own image; through redemption He adopts him as His son; He watches over man with a loving and merciful providence; and He becomes man's Last End, giving Himself as man's everlasting reward in heaven. If you impress these truths vividly upon your minds, you should feel drawn to correspond with God's designs, to fulfil the duties on your side which these relations with Him impose, and to render to God unceasingly the worship of your love and service.

In the first place, God, as your Creator, has brought you out of nothingness and given you your being. What wonderful goodness on God's part this displays! 'He made us, and not we ourselves' (Ps. xcix. 3). You would still be in nothingness, and all creation would exist without you, if it were not for that act of God's goodness and omnipotence

which called you forth into being. No one else could have done this: God alone is a Creator. He has done this although, absolutely speaking, He had no need of you. Although He is God, the only Infinite and Eternal Being, He had regard to you when you were nothing—less than the least of His creatures. You contributed nothing to your creation; it may be said that—inasmuch as after creation you offended your Creator, and He foreknew that this would be your conduct—your ingratitude thus foreknown supplied a reason why God should not create you. Yet God created you, and ranked you among the noblest of His creatures on earth, and gave you a destiny of everlasting greatness, happiness, and glory. 'Thou hast made him a little less than the Angels, Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour: Thou hast set him over the works of Thy hands' (Ps. viii. 6). This act of God establishes a relationship with what may be termed mutual duties between Him and you. He, on His part, supplies you with the faculties and graces which you need to offer, on your part, the worship and service which you owe Him as your Creator; for you are not independent of Him, but must give glory to Him, fulfil His designs, and be ever subject to Him. Only such conduct on your part would be dutiful, becoming, and honourable. To forget the benefit of creation, to disobey or turn against your Creator, would be ungrateful, and would bring upon you His just anger and punishment. As God said to Heli: 'Whosoever shall glorify Me, him will I glorify; but they that despise Me shall be despised' (1 Kings ii. 30). You

do not wish to be wanting in your duty of continual worship, but you call upon all creatures to join with you in praising your beneficent Creator: 'All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord; praise and exalt Him above all for ever' (Dan. iii. 57). And nothing pains you so much as to see sin committed, by which conduct the creature turns against the Creator. You recognise your Creator's claim upon the service of all your faculties every day, and at all times during your whole life, and what causes you sorrow is that you have ever been unfaithful in this service.

In the second place, God as your Redeemer has purchased you, and has raised you up by adoption to be the children of God. If it was wonderful that God should have created you, it must strike you as even more wonderful that He should have redeemed you; yet we will not make any comparison between these admirable works of God, since they are beyond our comprehension. In creation, as you have seen, God had regard to you when you were nothing; in redemption He had regard to you although you were sinners. He beheld you as rebels, as fallen from justice, as disgraced, as meriting everlasting reprobation. What did He do? He decreed the Incarnation of His only-begotten Son, who should take your sins upon Himself, to expiate them and to reconcile you with His Father. The mystery of your redemption in this manner was to be enveloped in many other mysteries; but nothing was to stand in the way of its most perfect accomplishment. Connected closely with the mystery of the Hypostatic Union are the mysteries of the Immaculate Conception, the

Virginal Maternity, the life, sufferings, and death of our Lord, and His Resurrection, Ascension, and everlasting advocacy in heaven. The most striking of these in connection with your redemption is the mystery of the Sacred Passion. How appalling were the sufferings endured by the Lamb of God, and how ignominious the death to which He submitted, in order to satisfy for your sins! Try to realize that it was God Himself who thus delivered Himself up for your redemption—as St. Paul says, who 'emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant'; and 'humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross' (Phil. ii. 7, 8). Try to realize also how great His sufferings were. Through redemption, too, as well as through creation, has God established relations with you. He is the Redeemer, and you are the redeemed. Through redemption you have been bought back, and have, moreover, been made the adopted children of God; and 'now,' as St. Paul says, 'being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end life everlasting' (Rom. vi. 22). Your duty, as having been redeemed, is not to place yourselves again under the bondage of sin, but to avail yourselves of the graces of sanctification purchased for you. St. Paul's words are: 'Christ died for all: that they also, who live, may not now live to themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again' (2 Cor. v. 15). Not only, then, must you live in dutifulness to God as His creatures, but also in holiness as becomes those whom He has redeemed and adopted as His children.

I can only refer briefly, in the third place, to God's relation with you by reason of His loving and merciful providence. This providence exists both in the material and in the spiritual order, and in both it is admirable. The earth and sky, the elements, the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, minister in wonderful ways to your wants. Call to mind the trust in Divine providence which our Lord inculcated when He pointed out the care which God has for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (St. Matt. vi. 26, 28), and declared that God takes even greater care of man. And consider how wonderfully the multitudes of men scattered over the globe are provided for. Have you been forgotten? Ah, no; you have to acknowledge your obligations to God for His abundant providence. In the spiritual order the display of His love and mercy is even more remarkable. It is discerned especially in the blessings which are imparted by the Holy Sacraments, by the teaching and guidance of the Church, by the Holy Mass and the public worship of the Church throughout the ecclesiastical seasons, and in the efficacy of prayer and of the intercession of the Saints. God has made this wonderful provision for you, although He denied to the fallen angels a mediator and all means of restoration to favour. The blessings of His loving providence wait upon you at every period of your life in all your necessities and difficulties, day by day, and they will be with you at the end. 'Behold,' said David, 'He shall neither slumber nor sleep that keepeth Israel' (Ps. cxx. 4); 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and His ears unto their

prayers' (Ps. xxxiii. 16). How wonderful, then, are the helps to sanctification, and how admirable the provision for your temporal necessities and welfare, for which you have to thank and praise God! I do not now delay to consider also your vocation to the religious state, in which state is found ample provision for both your spiritual and temporal needs. When the Queen of Saba saw all that was done in the household of Solomon for his servants, she was unable to contain her wonder, and said: 'Blessed are thy servants, who stand before thee always, and hear thy wisdom' (3 Kings x. 8). May not this be said of you also, who, in God's household of the religious life, are so richly blessed?

Lastly, God has His designs as to your future and everlasting life. If you are overcome by wonder, admiration, and gratitude in considering His designs in your regard in this world, where everything is short-lived and transient, what should be your feelings when you contemplate the blessings without number and without end which shall be yours in the kingdom of God in heaven? Consider the unspeakable glory of your resurrection, the exceeding excellence of your new state of being in your immortal life—the heavenly adornment of your soul and all its faculties, and the splendour of your body which, as St. Paul teaches, shall rise in incorruption, in glory, in power, immortal and spiritual, bearing the likeness of the Second Man, the heavenly Jesus Christ (1 Cor. xv. 42-53). Consider also the delights prepared for you in the bliss of heaven, where God Himself will be your reward. All God's other de-

signs will in heaven reach their completion and full accomplishment, when you shall enter into your everlasting inheritance of happiness and glory, and possess the kingdom of your heavenly Father.

Conclude these considerations by saying with David: 'Shall not my soul be subject to God? for from Him is my salvation;' and in beginning your retreat reflect how entirely you should be devoted to God's service; how your life belongs to God; how His benefits claim at your hands a constant recognition, which should be rendered by your praise, love, holiness of life, gratitude, obedience and submission. Reflect, too, how readily and worshipfully you should endeavour to correspond with all God's designs in your regard, since they are conceived and carried out with a justice, wisdom, perfection and goodness which are infinite. Ask yourselves if you have thought of all this when you have yielded to sin, when you have loved your own pleasure at times that duty called you to prayer or work, when you neglected to labour for your sanctification, or when you murmured at God's dispensations. Are your lives devoted to God with sincerity and constancy? See if you have reason to ask God to pardon you because you have loved inordinately the world, your own whims and conveniences, or what may be termed the pleasures of life and your own will. Ask yourselves, also, if you have endeavoured to profit by the blessings provided for you; if you have used temporal and material blessings with moderation, and if you have with due fervour striven to avail yourselves of the many helps to sanctification, according to

St. Peter's exhortation: 'As children of obedience, not fashioned according to the former desires of your ignorance, but according to Him that hath called you, who is holy, be you also in all manner of conversation holy' (1 St. Pet. i. 14, 15). Let your minds be fed with profitable food by meditation and pious reading; let your hearts seek the ways of dutifulness and turn ever to God with reverence, love, and submission; let your hands do the good work marked out for you; and let your feet follow with confidence the path of religious perfection. Thus will you correspond with God's designs in you, and merit to realize the blessings which they promise. 'They that trust in Him,' says the Book of Wisdom, 'shall understand the truth; and they that are faithful in love shall rest in Him; for grace and peace is to His elect' (iii. 9).

## III.

### *CORRESPONDENCE WITH GOD'S DESIGNS.*

'This is the will of God, your sanctification.'—1 THESS. iv. 3.

AFTER a serious study of God's designs in you, which brings before you so many of His wonderful works which have their bearing upon your well-being, it must strike you that something on your part is both expected and required. Take a lesson even from the fidelity which is witnessed in animals: when a man feeds and exercises his dog and is kind to it, the dog shows in return attachment to its master, and serves and protects him. A return is owing to God for all His care of you; it would be owing even if He had done only one thing for you. You have, however, considered how many and marvellous have been His works, and how loving are His designs; and you cannot but acknowledge that you belong to Him by His title to you by reason of creation, purchase, and tender providence, and that you should therefore live only to worship, love, obey and please Him. Reflect on our Lord's own words: 'God so loved the world, as to give His only-begotten Son' (St. John iii. 16). You can never make sufficient return for only this inestimable benefit. There should

be stamped on your souls, and manifested in your lives, the holiness which becomes those who are bound to God's service, and who have been so richly blessed by Him : 'This is the will of God, your sanctification.'

We will consider in what ways especially you should correspond with God's designs in you ; you should do so by worship, by dutifulness, by purity of mind and heart, by patience, and by fervour.

The soul of the devout Christian has an attraction towards prayer ; it feels it must give praise to God. See devout Christians faithful to morning and evening prayer, and raising their hearts to God from time to time during the day, and crowding into the churches to assist at Holy Mass or Benediction, or at Confraternity services. This is an edifying picture of worship ; the man of faith must render worship : 'Bring to the Lord,' said David, 'glory and honour ; bring to the Lord glory to His name' (Ps. xxviii. 2) ; 'Rejoice in the Lord, O ye just ; praise becometh the upright' (Ps. xxxii. 1). How earnestly should religious enter into this spirit of worship ! Sometimes seculars have a difficulty in finding time to satisfy their spirit of devotion ; but, happily, in religion every opportunity is afforded of worship, prayer, and piety. How much of your time is devoted to religious exercises ! It is expected in the Church that you will render the worship of prayer and praise for those whose incessant occupations do not permit them to render it, and for those also who, alas ! have no thought of rendering it. But you owe it, first of all, as a duty incumbent upon yourselves, as being God's servants and the recipients of so many of His bless-

ings. God has created you to give glory to Him; and this worship is rendered by the worship of prayer as well as by the worship of service in other ways. You must contribute your share to the acceptable perfumes which rise from earth before the throne of God, of which St. John tells us, where he says: 'The four living creatures and the four-and-twenty ancients fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints' (Apoc. v. 8). Assist, then, with great reverence and piety at the Holy Mass, receive the Holy Sacraments with fervent dispositions, make your meditations with every care, recite your Rosary devoutly, join cordially in special novenas, perform your visits to the Blessed Sacrament in a spirit of lively faith and affection, cultivate devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Holy Passion, and accustom yourselves to make ejaculatory prayers. What an array of pious practices is here presented to you! Yet you are familiar with them all. Who, then, shall be held to fulfil more perfectly than religious the duties of worship, prayer and praise? You should feel thankful to God for affording you such opportunities of piety; and you should love these exercises, which bring you in spirit so often before the throne of God, at the feet of your Lord and Saviour, and into communion with our Blessed Lady and the Saints. Perform these exercises in a spirit of worship, to return thanks for all God's goodness to you, and in supplication for all the graces which you need to make you good religious. Be on your guard, therefore, against indifference, weariness, and

indevotion, lest what should be to you so profitable a means towards your sanctification should lose its efficacy and be the occasion of many faults. Let it even be your thought and desire to begin in this world, in a prayerful spirit, that worship of praise which you hope to continue to render for evermore to God among the choirs of the Saints in heaven.

God asks at your hands, besides the worship of prayer and praise, the worship of your dutifulness in work and in manner of life; you must correspond with His designs by dutifulness, and this, too, is a most efficacious means of sanctification. In prayer you draw strength to accomplish the service which is demanded of you. It may be said that the life of religious is wisely divided between prayer, work, and reasonable relaxation; but each one of these divisions is yet consecrated to God as a service to which He is entitled. Do you regard your life as thus consecrated in all its parts and occupations to God? or do you offer Him a divided service? He asks of you dutifulness in carrying on the works intrusted to your institute, in fulfilling the offices assigned to you by your superiors, and in bearing the burden of religious observance. Happy are those communities in which this dutifulness is understood and complied with! Good order, contentment, charity, union, and fervour will reign in them. Happy, too, the individual religious who is dutiful! She thereby saves herself from many miseries, and she keeps herself in peace on the path of religious perfection. To the religious who fails in this respect may be addressed the message which our Lord sent to the

Bishop of Sardis: 'I find not thy works full before My God' (Apoc. iii. 2). There will be something unsatisfactory about her life; she opens the way for much faultiness, she is likely to do harm to others, and she lessens the confidence in her of her superiors. If she continues in her undutifulness, her conscience may become dull, and she may fall into a permanent condition of tepidity. You do not wish for yourselves so great a misfortune; you would be sorry to prove so ungrateful to God for all His goodness to you, and so indifferent about the work of your sanctification. In what way, then, should you act? Dutifulness supposes the fulfilment of what is expected of you in its entirety, with a devotion to it of all the time it requires, and with a care and earnestness which will insure its being done well. Your works, if performed in this manner, will be 'full.' God is worthy to receive this kind of service at your hands, and such service as this will be duly rewarded; for the parable tells us that to each of the servants who had turned their talents to profit the lord said: 'Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord' (St. Matt. xxv. 21). 'They,' our Lord has said, 'that have done good things shall come forth unto the resurrection of life' (St. John v. 29). Let it, then, be your pleasure, as it certainly is your interest, to be dutiful in all your works and in all your life, thus to correspond with God's designs in your regard.

Besides the worship of prayer and of work, God

asks of you purity of mind and heart. Can you conceive your being acceptable to Him without this? Can you suppose your sanctification without it? Happily, the various parts of the spiritual edifice are adapted one to the other; so we may say that, if you are dutiful in prayer and work, it will almost certainly follow that you will have a clean and well-regulated conscience. Of the man who does the works of justice David says: 'The law of God is in his heart' (Ps. xxxvi. 31). You cannot please God without this interior sanctity, for, as one of the prophets says: 'His eyes are too pure to behold evil' (Hab. i. 13); and according to many passages of Holy Writ, without it you will not be admitted into heaven, where nothing defiled shall enter (Apoc. xxi. 27). David asks: 'Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord?' and he answers, saying: 'The innocent in hands and clean of heart' (Ps. xxiii. 3, 4); and our Lord says: 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God' (St. Matt. v. 8). The spiritual faculties of the soul are represented by the mind and heart; of the soul are thoughts and principles, affections and purposes, and they are as the spring and fountain of all moral actions. 'The things,' our Lord has said, 'which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart' (St. Matt. xv. 18). Your fidelity, your clinging to virtue and to the path of duty, and your efforts to please God by a devout religious life, as well as your understanding and appreciation of the benefit and necessity of such conduct, must proceed from interior enlightenment and holy purpose—that is, from your

mind and heart, moved and supported by grace. The character, too, of your actions, and the degree of their perfection or imperfection, come from the same source. God holds a man accountable for his purposes, and rewards him accordingly. Circumstances often prevent or alter their accomplishment, but they are known to God, who judges a man by his intentions. When God had rejected Saul, He said to Samuel: 'Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature: because I have rejected him, nor do I judge according to the look of man: for man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart' (1 Kings xvi. 7). And when David, approaching his end, gave solemn exhortation to Solomon, he inculcated the same lesson, saying: 'Know the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart, and a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the thoughts of minds' (1 Par. xxviii. 9). You may gather from this teaching how necessary it is to have regard to your interior perfection: your heart is ever under the eye of God as an open book, and He reads all its movements and all its purposes. Reject, then, promptly from your mind and heart everything which savours of evil, that you may, as far as possible, keep your conscience undefiled by wilful sin. The temptations which assault you will turn to your gain and reward, provided only that you stand firmly against them. Consecrate your minds and heart to God, together with all your works, and seek only the glory of God in all you do (1 Cor. x. 31); thus you will correspond with God's designs in you, and advance

the work of your sanctification, with the happy result of interior peace and a calm conscience. 'What,' asks St. Bernard, 'is of greater value, or more soothing to the heart, or more tranquil or secure on earth, than a good conscience? It does not fear the loss of goods, nor the taunts of words, nor sufferings of body, and even in death itself it is rather lifted up than cast down.'*

There is, in the fourth place, a phase of life which must be met by special conduct on your part—I mean the dispensation of many trials. In these, too, God has His designs for your welfare, and they are the fruitful source of sanctification; but they must be borne with patience. A good religious does not desire or seek any other way to the heavenly goal of her Christian hope than that which our Lord has pointed out by His doctrine and example, and which has been pursued by the Apostles and all the Saints; she knows 'that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God' (Acts xiv. 21). She knows, too, that God, who was glorified by the sufferings of His Son, is also glorified by those of His followers; for our Lord, when He said that He was the true Vine, and that His Father was the Husbandman, told His disciples that His followers were the branches, and that His Father would purge every branch that bore fruit, that it might bring forth more fruit (St. John xv. 2); and He went on to say: 'In this is My Father glorified,

* 'Quid ditius, quid in corde dulcius, quid in terra quietius est et securius bonâ conscientiâ? damna rerum non metuit,' etc.—ST. BERNARD.

that you bring forth much fruit, and become My disciples' (xv. 8). How faithful a disciple was St. Paul! How many and various were the sufferings which he underwent (2 Cor. xi. 23)! He was able to say: 'With Christ I am nailed to the Cross' (Gal. ii. 19). You also are children of the Crucified. Do you, when trials come upon you, embrace them with Christian fortitude and patience, that you may bear some slight resemblance to your Divine Saviour? St. Paul described himself and his fellow-labourers, to use his own words, as 'always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies' (2 Cor. iv. 10). How far is the life of our Lord made manifest in religious who endeavour to shirk every cross, and who murmur under every contradiction and suffering? In what way may they be said to correspond with God's designs, and to be zealous for their own sanctification, seeing that many of God's dispensations are distinctly those of suffering, or of trial of one kind or another; while in many other dispensations failure is mingled with success, sorrow with joy, and pain with pleasure? Where in this world do we find sweetness unalloyed by some bitterness? Just as the metal is not moulded into perfect shape without much heating and hammering, so the Christian soul will remain far from perfect, unless it passes under the rude trial of temptations, sorrows, annoyances, cares, labours, and sufferings. These may not in every case be severe, but such as they may be ordained by an ever-wise Providence, they must be borne with becoming humility and patience;

therefore is patience necessary to you, if you would correspond with God's designs, and be prepared for what is a common, though trying, phase of the Christian and religious life.

You should, lastly, seek to correspond with God's designs in your regard by a spirit of fervour; fervour it is which should animate your worship, your dutifulness, your conscientiousness, and your patience, and, as it were, cement them together into an acceptable service of God. The spirit in which you should offer this becoming service should be one of fervour, for it is the service of children, and the Father is your heavenly Father, God. The greater the master, the more exact the service; the kinder the master, the more devoted the service. What fervour, then, you should bring to the service of God! This fervour is a practical demonstration of your charity. God cannot ask of you less love than that which you owe, and you know that what you owe is the love of your whole heart: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind' (St. Matt. xxii. 37). God cannot therefore ask of you less than the most fervent service—that is, the service which is the outcome of this love. Where St. Paul speaks of his zeal for the glory of God, he says: 'For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day' (2 Cor. iv. 16). See how the Apostle kept up his fervour! He did not allow his incessant occupations or his bodily weakness to prevent his daily renewal of fervour in the service of his Lord and

in his zeal for the Church. Fervour such as his sweetens labour, and saves the soul from weariness. At times religious are to be met with who weary of their service, because of the monotony of the daily and weekly routine; this is a yielding to the lower nature, which does not love what is spiritual. The religious routine of every day should form you every day more and more perfectly, according to the model after which you are to be fashioned, and your perseverance in this routine is one of the grandest tokens of your fidelity to your vocation. This perseverance is your daily sacrifice, which you offer to God in union with the sacrifice of His Divine Son 'for an odour of sweetness.' 'Walk in love,' St. Paul says, 'as Christ also hath loved us, and hath delivered Himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness' (Eph. v. 2). Take away fervour, and you take away the cement of the building of religiousness, and soon will follow its deterioration and its ruin; but with fervour energy will be maintained, zeal will be instigated, generosity will be fostered, progress will be made, and God will be glorified. See, then, how necessary this spirit of fervour is to enable you to correspond dutifully with God's designs in you, and to labour with effect in the work of your sanctification. Your fervour will be to your lives as the fragrance of the garments worn by Jacob when he secured his father's blessing; it will earn merit for you in the sight of God, and bring His blessing upon you (Gen. xxvii. 27).

When you have weighed carefully what we have now been considering, you will be fully persuaded that it is your duty to co-operate with God's designs

in your regard in the ways we have seen. Have you done this up to the present? In which of the ways have you failed or been negligent? In the spirit of worship, or in dutifulness of conduct? In purity of mind and heart, or in patience? Or in fervour? Look into your hearts for an answer to these questions. Happily, you are not of the number of thoughtless, undutiful servants, who have strayed into profitless ways leading to spiritual misery, to whom might be addressed the words of the prophet: 'Thou hast forsaken the fountain of wisdom; for if thou hadst walked in the way of God, thou hadst surely dwelt in peace for ever. Learn where is wisdom, where is strength, where is understanding, that thou mayest know also where is length of days and life, where is the light of the eyes, and peace' (Baruch iii. 12-14). Yet there is for you also a lesson in these words which it would be well to learn: the way we have been studying is the wise and the profitable way, and the pursuit of it will bring peace and other blessings. To the worldly, the sensual, and the unspiritual the lesson is lost; or it is not understood by them. As the Book of Wisdom says: 'The people see this, and understand not, nor lay up such things in their hearts: that the grace of God, and His mercy is with His Saints, and that He hath respect to His chosen' (iv. 14, 15). In vain do such expect peace and satisfaction of heart, or even grace and mercy, while they persist in following profitless, unwise, and unworthy paths.

In the first place, enter into yourselves and see how far you have understood these conditions of correspondence with God's loving designs, and

examine if your lives give evidence of your having fulfilled them. Perhaps in some respects there has not been all that earnestness which true religiousness calls for.

In the second place, humble yourselves on account of any lack of dutifulness, or earnestness, or fervour which you may detect in your conduct, and try to excite yourselves to compunction. Call to mind God's infinite love and Divine condescensions as displayed in His designs—in creation, redemption, gracious providence, and crowning reward. Look upon Him as your First Beginning and Last End and as the only King worthy of your everlasting service, and see how little it would be on your part to comply, by the help of His grace, with all the conditions which His service demands.

In the third place, make your good resolutions as to your future fidelity. In the religious state the path to be followed is planned out for you so clearly, it only remains for you to follow it dutifully and with a truly religious spirit. Many corresponding with grace have been moulded to high sanctity by treading paths similar to those marked out for you: will not you also yield yourselves to the operations of grace in your souls? Do you not feel drawn to wish to tread the wise and the holy way, that you may be filled with confidence and enjoy peace of heart? There are some, alas! who are heedless of God's invitations, and who pursue the unwise course of their own waywardness or sloth. Of these it is said in Holy Writ: 'Because they have hated instruction, and received not the fear of the Lord, nor consented to My counsel, but despised all My reproof; there-

fore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and shall be filled with their own devices' (Prov. i. 29-31). Not so you; you turn to the light of God's instruction, you accept His reproaches and reproofs, you mend your ways, you seek to correspond with His designs.

Lastly, you will cast yourselves in prayer before the throne of God; you will pray for the light and guidance which you need and for all the graces which you require, to enable you, in spite of your own weakness and of other obstacles, to follow this guidance and to correspond with God's designs. You will also turn in prayer to your heavenly Mother and Advocate, in whose patronage you place such loving confidence, and beg of her to obtain for you in every circumstance of your lives grace to prove faithful to her Divine Son, that the designs of His love and mercy may be accomplished in you.

'This is the will of God, your sanctification;' by God's grace, this same will, and desire, and aim will also be yours. How laudable will be the effort to render yourselves pleasing to God! 'They that fear the Lord,' says the holy writer, 'will prepare their hearts, and in His sight will sanctify their souls' (Ecclus. ii. 20). Your sanctification will be your adornment and your strength in this life; it will secure your heavenly reward. But it comes from God, being the fruit of His grace. You must therefore seek ever to fulfil the conditions of obtaining this all-necessary grace, and God, who is ever loving and bountiful, will bestow it according to the measure of your needs and according to the decrees of His own infinite goodness.

## IV.

### *MORTAL SIN.*

'Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.'—Ps. xl. 5.

HUMAN frailty manifests itself in some degree in every state of life; you may wish it to be absent from the holy state of religion, but it is discovered even there. A distinction should, however, be made between the frailty which you struggle against and strive to correct and the frailty which you yield to. Even the frailty which you strive to correct is in various ways detrimental to you. What, then, should be said of that to which you offer no resistance, and to which you even lend your co-operation? You evidently become its abettors, and become consequently contaminated by its moral deformity; in other words, you contract the malice or guilt, and you become amenable to the punishment.

There are to be met with unreal, self-deceiving moralists, who object to have the light turned fully on to moral guilt: they would rather get but a dim view of it. When speaking of it they employ terms which tend to soothe the pang of conscience, and to cloak the malice of the offence committed. Happily, you have not to upbraid yourselves with having fallen

into mortal sin, but in this retreat you do not wish to deceive yourselves about any faults of which you may have been guilty. You do not intend to advance, as an excuse for not dealing effectively with your failings, your susceptibilities; you are not anxious to minimize your responsibility for them; you do not mean to term as only a little weakness what is downright sinful; you wish the light to fall fully upon the wounds of your soul, that you may recognise what your sins have been, that you may repent sincerely of them, and that you may apply to the wounds the necessary and useful remedies. Whatever your guilt may have been, you will renew your spirit of repentance, and say with the penitent David: 'O Lord, be Thou merciful to me: heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.'

Although, happily, the commission of mortal sin by religious is rare and exceptional, meditation upon so great an evil is nevertheless profitable, if only to inspire you with a greater horror of it, to make you grateful for that goodness which is displayed by God in preserving you from it, to fill you with the desire of making amends to God for such sin in His creatures by your fervour, penances, and devotedness, and to impress you with the necessity of avoiding every danger of falling into so grievous a sin. Let me begin by saying that it is impossible to exaggerate the evil of mortal sin. Language, it is true, can paint its deformity, but our mind is not able to conceive the full meaning of the terms in which we describe it.

We will make our reflections upon mortal sin

aided by various passages found in the Holy Scriptures; they will throw light upon its many phases, always, however, exhibiting it as an outrage offered to God, and as an unmitigated calamity for the man who is guilty of it. The texts adduced in proof or illustration of the matter under consideration convey valuable teaching as to the reality and enormity of the malice of sin, as to the ingratitude and miserable plight of the sinner, and as to the terrible consequences which follow from mortal sin, and the final and everlasting punishment which will be inflicted upon the impenitent. As you pass in review so much doctrine, it should make a deep impression on your minds, and make you reflect upon your own indebtedness to God, either for His goodness in having preserved you in your innocency, or for His mercy in having drawn you to repentance if you have ever had the misfortune to fall into mortal sin.

We will content ourselves with considering only seven aspects of the gravity of mortal sin.

Mortal sin, in the first place, is an act of rebellion against God. Wonderful as is God's display of mercy and condescension in winning back fallen man to his allegiance, yet neither in this nor in any other of His dealings with His creatures has He ever in any way or in any measure, however slight, suffered the diminution of His supreme authority; this is as the apple of His eye. His sovereignty must ever be maintained in all its fulness. Conceive, then, the malignity and enormity of sin, seeing that by mortal sin the sinner flouts God's command and proclaims his revolt. Sin, as a

rebellion, thinned the ranks of the Angels, and brought Lucifer and his host into the bottomless pit. Similar in character was the sin of the Israelites in the desert. When they dared to murmur, Moses said to them: 'Be not rebellious against God' (Num. xiv. 9); at another time, 'Hear,' he said, 'ye rebellious and incredulous people' (xx. 10); and later on he upraided them, saying: 'You were always rebellious from the day that I began to know you' (Deut. ix. 24). God resented their rebellion, and complained of it by His prophet when He said: 'Of old time thou hast broken My yoke, thou hast burst My bands, and thou saidst: I will not serve' (Jer. ii. 20). These passages of Holy Writ describe the conduct of sinners as rebellious. They rebel against the supreme authority; they do not even wish to know God's commands. As holy Job says: 'They have been rebellious to the light, they have not known God's ways' (Job xxiv. 13). They join with those citizens spoken of in our Lord's parable, who said: 'We will not have this man to reign over us' (St. Luke xix. 14). But the day of reckoning came when the lord rewarded the dutiful citizens, but then added: 'As for those my enemies who would not have me reign over them, bring them hither and kill them before me.'

In the second place, the commission of mortal sin contains the wickedness of apostasy; the sinner becomes as an apostate and a renegade. The Church in her rite for blessing holy water terms the fallen angels 'apostate angels'; they apostatized from their allegiance and duty to God. This is also

the base conduct of the sinner. 'Thy own wickedness,' God said by His prophet, 'shall reprove thee, and thy apostasy shall rebuke thee' (Jer. ii. 19). Almost desperate and fatal are the results of conduct so base; the sinner should not delay to retrace his steps in order to escape them. Solomon calls the sinner 'a man that is an apostate, an unprofitable man,' and he goes on to say: 'To such a one his destruction shall presently come, and he shall suddenly be destroyed' (Prov. vi. 15). Yes; God has often brought upon sinners a sudden and unprovided end. They have imitated the apostate angels, and have met with the same punishment. 'The beginning of the pride of man is to fall off from God' (Ecclus. x. 14). How great the wickedness and folly of such apostasy!

Consider, in the third place, that the sinner turns God against him. The Holy Scriptures tell us how God was affected by the wickedness of men before the deluge: 'It repented Him that He had made man on the earth. And being touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, He said: I will destroy man' (Gen. vi. 6, 7). How great the evil of sin when it compels God to turn against the work of His hands, and to wish He had not produced it! Sin, as it were, raises a barrier between God and the sinner. As He told His people in the time of Isaias: 'Your iniquities have divided between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He should not hear' (Isa. lix. 2). The Book of Wisdom explains why this must be so, where it says: 'To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike'

(xiv. 9), and in Jeremias we read God's message to His people conveying the same meaning: 'Thou art stained in thy iniquity before Me' (ii. 22). We learn from these passages of Holy Writ that God can no longer look upon sinners with complacnece; He must turn away from them, to leave them in that misery and degradation which they have brought upon themselves, and 'Woe to them,' He says by His prophet, 'when I shall depart from them' (Osee ix. 12). What must necessarily follow if not spiritual death? St. Augustine says that 'as the soul is the life of the body, so is God the life of the soul; and as the body dies when it sends forth the soul, so does the soul die when it loses God' (Serm. 28, de Verbis Apost.).

In the fourth place, the sinner turns away from God—that is, from his Creator, heavenly Father, Divine Benefactor, and from the only and sovereign Good. How great, how shameful, and how fatal, is this perversity on the part of the sinner! 'You have all forsaken Me,' God says by one prophet (Jer. ii. 29); and by another He says, 'Woe to them, for they have departed from Me: they shall be wasted, because they have transgressed against Me' (Osee vii. 13). If the sinner ever realized what God is to him—his absolute need of God for his being, his support, his strength, his welfare, his peace, his preservation, his sanctification, and eternal salvation—he disregards it when he sins. By his action, if not by word, he seems to say: I care not what God is to me, or even what He can do to me; I will yield to this passion; I will grant myself this unlawful satisfaction; I will

pursue this wicked conduct; I will do this evil thing. Could wickedness and folly go further? Ecclesiasticus says: 'Of what an evil fame is he that forsaketh his father' (iii. 18); but God is the sinner's heavenly Father and his very Creator. 'Thou art our Father, and we are clay; and Thou art our Maker, and we are the works of Thy hands' (Isa. lxiv. 8). How infamous to forsake Him! yet this is what the sinner does. How impious his conduct appears when we further consider that he leaves God—his heavenly Father, his All—to turn to and to give himself to what is evil, profitless, empty, vain, and disastrous; it may even be to what is deteriorating to his honour, and to what is shameful. 'Consider diligently,' God says, 'and see if there hath been done anything like this. If a nation hath changed their gods—and indeed they are not gods; but My people have changed their glory into an idol.' Remark the pathos which appears in His remonstrance and indignation when He goes on to say: 'Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and, ye gates thereof, be very desolate, saith the Lord. For My people have done two evils. They have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water' (Jer. ii. 12, 13). The man who is guilty of such wickedness and folly as this merits indeed to be regarded as an abandoned sinner; but such is the greatness of God's mercy, that even to him comes the message from the 'Father of mercies': 'Return to Me, and I will return to you' (Mal. iii. 7).

In the fifth place, mortal sin brings dishonour on

the soul. It is the only obstacle which prevents man from attaining his end, peace of soul in this world, and happiness and glory in the world to come with the possession of God. For see what are its effect and consequences. Mortal sin impoverishes the soul by depriving it, so long as it remains in the state of sin, of all merits acquired, and renders it while in that state incapable of acquiring any further supernatural merit; it destroys the soul's supernatural life of charity and grace, and leaves the soul an easy prey to the enemies of its salvation. All this is dishonouring to it. Our Lord's words to the Bishop of Laodicea apply to the sinner, 'Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked' (Apoc. iii. 17). When you consider that grace is the fruit of our Lord's Incarnation and Redemption, and ponder on all that our Lord has done and suffered to save man from sin and hell, and to open to him the channels of sanctifying grace and the gates of salvation, what must you think of the sinner who, as far as he is concerned, sets all this at naught, and renders it unprofitable? Who shall say how gravely he thus despises God, and how deeply, by such malice and baseness, he thereby sinks in dishonour and infamy? Our Lord has said: 'Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin' (St. John viii. 34). Leaving the honourable and glorious service of God, how base, then, is the service which the sinner has entered! 'How exceedingly base art thou become!' (Jer. ii. 36). The miserable condition of the sinner will appear to you in a yet more appalling light when you reflect upon the hopelessness

of his case if left to himself, since of himself he cannot rise, or recover that honour which he has forfeited by sin. He must remain for ever in dishonour, and deprived of grace, if God does not show him mercy and draw him to true repentance. The sinner has abandoned the safe and the holy way, and has fallen among thieves; they have stripped him, wounded him, and left him for dead (St. Luke x. 30). There where he has fallen he must remain prostrate—wounded and to die—unless the Good Samaritan draws near; unless God, passing over the outrages offered Him, receives him once more into the arms of His mercy. But while he remains in his sin, his dishonour rests with him. The dishonour of the wicked, if they do not repent, will pass with them into the world to come. As it is written: 'The Lord shall laugh them to scorn. And they shall fall after this without honour, and be a reproach among the dead for ever' (Wisd. iv. 18, 19).

Reflect, in the sixth place, upon the ingratitude of the sinner. His conduct is like that of God's chosen people, which caused the prophet to upbraid Israel, saying: 'Thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God at that time when He led thee by the way' (Jer. ii. 17). The psalmist describes sinners as men 'in whose hands are iniquities; their right hand is filled with gifts' (Ps. xxv. 10). The Eternal Father looks for the fruit of creation. He has given the sinner being to do honour to his Creator; but by transgressing God's laws the sinner dishonours Him (Rom. ii. 23). He has, as the psalmist says, received his soul in vain (Ps. xxiii. 4). God complains of this ungrateful

treatment, saying: 'The son honoureth his father, and the servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is My honour? and if I be a Master, where is My fear' (Mal. i. 6); just as Moses of old had said: 'Is this the return thou makest to the Lord, O foolish and senseless people? Is not He thy Father, that hath possessed thee, and made thee, and created thee?' (Deut. xxxii. 6).

The Eternal Word looks for the fruit of redemption; He assumed human nature, shed His most precious Blood, and gave His very life for the sinner's sanctification and salvation: 'He was wounded for our iniquities; He was bruised for our sins' (Isa. liii. 5). And now He has to ask: 'What profit is there in My Blood?' (Ps. xxix. 10). St. John indeed tells us that 'the Blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin' (1 St. John i. 7); but sinners defile their soul again and again. Such wickedness on their part is described by St. Paul as 'crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery' (Heb. vi. 6). The ingratitude of sinners to their Divine Redeemer is depicted in one of the prophets, where we read: 'What are these wounds in the midst of Thy Hands? With these I was wounded in the house of them that loved Me' (Zach. xiii. 6). The sinner at one time loved our Lord, but he was seduced by sin, and proved ungrateful to Him.

The Holy Ghost looks for the fruit of His indwelling and of His sanctifying grace. St. Paul appeals, all in vain, to the sinner, saying: 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God' (Eph. iv. 30); for the

sinner, making light of all that the Holy Ghost has done in his soul, and drawn away by base desires and affections, dissipates the graces received, and despises those which are proffered. 'I planted thee,' the Holy Ghost says, 'a chosen vineyard, all true seed: how then art thou turned unto Me into that which is good for nothing?' (Jer. ii. 21). Sinners, like the Jews who stoned St. Stephen, 'resist the Holy Ghost' (Acts vii. 51), and He then bestows upon others the rich blessings which they refuse.

Our seventh and last consideration shall be that by mortal sin a man brings confusion and punishment upon himself. The sinner turns his back upon God and heaven, and upon what is good and holy—but for what? To become the victim of vice, the dupe of his own waywardness, the slave of Satan, a child of wrath, and, finally, a reprobate for ever in hell. Who will not, then, acknowledge that mortal sin is not only man's greatest evil, but also the very consummation of his folly? The prophet says: 'Know thou, and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God' (Jer. ii. 19). The sinner, if he dies impenitent, will realize and suffer the terrible condemnation passed upon the unprofitable servant—the exterior darkness, the gnashing of teeth, the gnawing worm that dies not, and the inextinguishable fire in the abyss from which there is no return or redemption. This punishment of the world to come will be preceded, even in this world, by unrest, spiritual want, interior goadings and misgivings, misery, and finally despair. 'They,' said our Lord, 'that have done good things shall

come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment' (St. John v. 29).

How terrible the lessons before you of God's punishments!—of Lucifer and the fallen angels cast into everlasting fire, of the evils which befell man when he sinned, of the world destroyed by the deluge, of cities destroyed by fire and brimstone, of the rich man buried in hell! 'A man,' wrote St. Paul, 'making void the law of Moses, dieth without any mercy under two or three witnesses: how much more do you think he deserveth worse punishments who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath esteemed the Blood of the testament unclean by which he was sanctified, and hath offered an affront to the Spirit of grace?' See, by these inspired words, how grievous is a sin when committed under the law of grace! The Apostle then continues: 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb. x. 28, etc.). For sinners only is reserved God's sentence of condemnation: 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire' (St. Matt. xxv. 41).

We will here finish the picture of the evils which come in the train of mortal sin—an evil itself, essentially opposed to God and all His perfections, and an abomination introduced into the midst of His work by His own creature: 'The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord' (Prov. xv. 9). It is as the cockle sown by an enemy over the good seed: 'Didst Thou not sow good seed in Thy field? Whence, then, hath it cockle? An enemy hath done this' (St. Matt. xiii. 27, 28). You have seen how the

sinner becomes a rebel against God, and an apostate from the holy way; how he turns God against him, and he himself turns away from God; how he brings dishonour upon himself, and is guilty of the basest ingratitude; and, finally, how he incurs the greatest of evils, the loss of heaven and God, and the infliction of everlasting punishment in hell. The picture appals you; it reveals some little of the indescribable malice of mortal sin. You say, How great is the wickedness of the sinner, and how unintelligible his folly! O God, save me from such wickedness and folly! Heli said to his sons: 'If one man shall sin against another, God may be appeased in his behalf; but if a man shall sin against the Lord, who shall pray for him?' (1 Kings ii. 25). Happily, there is, through God's infinite mercy, a way open to the sinner, and if only he follows it he may be saved from his wickedness, and from the evils which by it he has brought upon himself; the way is that of sincere conversion and repentance.

But do not minimize in the least what is the true and terrible character of the malice of sin, or gloss over the reality of its evil consequences. Have you, reviewing your past life, any particular reason to be impressed by what you have now been considering? If, unhappily, you were ever in the state of mortal sin, by how great a mercy you were rescued from it! What would have befallen you if God had regarded you with the eyes of His just wrath, and not with the eyes of His tender mercy? Acknowledge once more God's goodness, and beseech Him to remove far from you the evils resulting from your fall. What has

happened to so many others who fell away from God? Have all regained the way of salvation? Saul, David, and Solomon fell; and of these, as far as we know, only David repented of his fall.

What a source of joy and consolation it should be to you to see yourselves now enrolled in the service of your heavenly Spouse, and protected against mortal sin by more than ordinary graces and safeguards! St. Paul says: 'The Lord knoweth who are His, and let everyone depart from iniquity who nameth the Name of the Lord' (2 Tim. ii. 19). To you the psalmist says: 'You that love the Lord hate evil' (Ps. xcvi. 10). You are banded together to offer to God a holy service, and to devote yourselves to good works. Note, then, some words of St. Paul, which you may take as addressed to yourselves, exhorting you to watch over the sinlessness of your lives. 'All of you,' he says, 'are children of light, and children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness. . . . From all appearance of evil refrain yourselves' (1 Thess. v. 5, 22). You are warned of the consequences of a contrary conduct where the holy writer says: 'Nor bind sin to sin; for even in one thou shalt not be unpunished' (Ecclus. vii. 8).

Do not approach the brink of the precipice to look down it—keep far away from it; do not draw near the flames to feel their warmth—keep at a distance from them; do not sip at the fountain of evil—the waters are poisonous. If a religious commits mortal sin, how sad her fall! Does she stop at one mortal sin? Does she ever become a stumbling-block to others, religious or seculars? When so

painful a scandal has occurred, has there perhaps followed hypocrisy, sacrilege, or apostasy? I put these questions only to show what surmises the fall of a religious may occasion. When there is perversity where there should be such sanctity, how great that perversity may be! How sad it was to see Sion laid waste! David sang in his praise of it: 'The Lord hath chosen Sion: He hath chosen it for His dwelling' (Ps. cxxxi. 13). But when the holy city had been visited with punishment, on account of the wickedness of its people, we hear the sorrowful plaints of the prophets: 'The city of Thy sanctuary is become a desert, Sion is made a desert, Jerusalem is desolate' (Isa. lxiv. 10); 'How doth the city sit solitary . . . all her gates are broken' (Lam. i. 1, 4). Take Sion as a picture of the soul of a religious: how beautiful and richly adorned is that soul when in the state of grace and fervour, but in what a condition of ruin and desolation when in the state of sin and unfaithfulness! Oh, may any religious who has tasted this bitterness of spiritual destitution be speedily converted! 'Deal favourably, O Lord, in Thy goodwill with Sion, that the walls of Jerusalem may be built up' (Ps. l. 20). For, sad as is the condition of a religious who has fallen into grievous sin, doubly sad would it be if, having fallen, she were to refuse to rise.

May these considerations increase your horror of mortal sin, and lead you to pray fervently to God to preserve you from so great an evil! Let this thought be in your minds when you say: 'Deliver us from evil.' May these considerations determine you to be

earnest and persevering in your efforts to avoid venial sin! You may apply to venial sin some of the force of the texts which I have adduced. It is a lesser sin—it does not deprive the soul of sanctifying grace; but it is yet an offence against God, and it has its evil consequences. If you ought to abide in fervent charity—if you ought to dispose yourselves to assist at Holy Mass daily, to receive Holy Communion frequently, and to devote yourselves so often to prayer —what an effort you should make to live free from every kind of deliberate sin! Let not, however, despondency or discouragement weigh you down if sometimes, notwithstanding your good resolutions, you fall into lesser faults through human frailty. Only try to make amends for them by exercising greater circumspection and by renewed fervour; but keep ever before you the truth that sin is the great evil which it must be your resolve and your endeavour to avoid, and be assured that the greater purity of soul you aim at, the more sanctified you will become. May God inspire you with yet greater zeal for your sanctification! In proportion to the greatness of this zeal will be your detestation of sin and your efforts to avoid it. 'He that is just, let him be justified still; and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still' (Apoc. xxii. 11).

## SECOND DAY.

### V.

### *TEPIDITY.*

'The charity of many shall grow cold.'—ST. MATT. xxiv. 12.

RELIGIOUS do well to live ever impressed with a dread of falling into the state of mortal sin; and perhaps it is this very dread, acting in conjunction with grace, which has been a means of saving many religious from committing grievous sin. There is, however, another dangerous state which may prove to them a serious stumbling-block in the way of their tending to perfection: this is the state of tepidity. They must not, therefore, confine their attention only to mortal sin as an evil to be strenuously avoided, but they should guard themselves also against falling into a condition of tepidity, which is one of remissness in the service of God. You would do well in the retreat to convince yourselves of the danger to which you are exposed of falling away from fervour, and thereby rendering your service of God less acceptable to Him; if you have not also reason to desire an awakening, because you have already been

overcome by apathy and remissness. If you fail to discover in your spiritual life any energy and growth manifested by the unremitting dutiful character of your piety, observance, and works, look back to your first steps in the way of your vocation to examine if there has not been some falling-off, and to see if such retrogression is owing to tepidity. If you are poorer and weaker, and if the light of faith and spiritual discernment has become dim, it is evident that the gold of your charity is diminished in quantity and lustre, and that you need to turn to Him who wishes to correct and perfect His elect, and who invites you, saying: 'I counsel thee to buy of Me gold fire-tried, that thou mayest be made rich. . . . Such as I love, I rebuke and chastise. Be zealous therefore, and do penance' (Apoc. iii. 18, 19). This message was addressed by our Lord to the tepid Bishop of Laodicea, to whom He had written by His Apostle: 'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot . . . thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind' (iii. 15, 17). These words reveal the gravity of tepidity. The sending of the message of warning was an act of mercy; our Lord wished the conversion of this tepid Bishop, lest He should be forced to cut him off from the number of His elect. If, then, God speaks to the conscience of any religious, awakening her to her condition of apathy and remissness, she should regard it as an admonition dictated by God's loving condescension and tender mercy; as the pleading of Divine love with one who has erred from the path of duty; and as a warning of the danger of continuing a manner

of conduct so little in keeping with the holiness of her vocation, and with the rich and abundant graces which accompany it.

Tepidity may be described as the state of one who has fallen away from fervour, and, as it is generally understood, the state of spiritual remissness which does not suppose the actual commission of mortal sin. The state of tepidity therefore may be said to be bounded on the one side by the state of fervour, and on the other by the state of mortal sin. Tepidity as thus defined is the subject of the present conference; and, as you should always set your face against unreality and exaggeration, I preface my treatment of this subject with the assurance that I do not wish to inspire with misgivings religious who are more or less fervent; I address my warnings and exhortations to those who are actually tepid.

Tepidity is undoubtedly the cause of many venial sins, and the danger of persevering in it is that mortal sin may follow such callousness and remissness; but all falls into sin may not rightly be attributed to it. For instance, if Heli failed to correct his sons, we should not say that it was because of his tepidity, but because of his weakness in exercising parental control. Again, if St. Peter denied his Lord, we should not attribute it to tepidity, but to rashness, and to fear, resulting from misplaced confidence in himself. If, however, we meet with religious who seem to have lost all idea of the obligation of observance, who constantly disedify others by neglect of duty, and who make little or nothing of breaches of charity, truthfulness,

or obedience, then there exists more than a passing weakness or particular failing to account for such conduct — the religious has fallen into a general condition or state of tepidity; the sense of duty is weakened, the idea of guiltiness is less clear, the consequences of sin are less distinctly realized, the claims of God upon the creature's entire love and service are less regarded, the light of faith's teaching is dimmed, and the fire of charity and piety burns low. When a religious has come to this condition of spiritual deterioration, from which fervour is absent, is it surprising that such conduct as that which I have just supposed should be the consequence? Is it surprising that there should be a relaxation of effort, universal apathy, and a general negligence?

We must allow, however, that within the bounds which we have ascribed to the state of tepidity there are various degrees, some not far distant from the state of fervour, and others in perilous proximity to the state of mortal sin, and others, again, between these. When, therefore, a religious is said to be tepid, it does not follow that she is in the most dangerous degree of tepidity; but there is this alarming consideration, that, once a religious has become tepid, there is a possibility of her sinking to the lowest and most dangerous degree of tepidity; and who shall say how long she may remain tepid, or how disastrous may be the results of her being in that state? In commercial transactions, when a man neglects his business and gets into debt, who shall say when he will be able to clear himself? His

friends become concerned on his account, for such a man often sinks deeper in debt, and finally fails in business and is ruined. Are there no failures in religion, and to what are they attributable? Is not tepidity the chief cause of them? Religious become indifferent; they become debtors, inasmuch as they leave their obligations unfulfilled; matters become gradually worse; and finally what remains in them of the religious life and character? Must it not be said that these religious have failed in their calling?

A religious should be on her guard not to fall into the state of tepidity through discouragement. It seems only natural that the first beginnings in the religious life should be marked with the character of fervour; and this may also be by a special Divine dispensation, to compensate the young religious for the sacrifices which she has made, to help her over the first difficulties of her new state of life, and to inspire her with a love of her vocation and with generosity in pursuing it. She should, however, be careful not to entertain erroneous notions of what the religious life is; she must not comfort herself with delusions. She is still on this desolate earth; she has to bear her cross day by day; she has to be tried by temptation; she has to experience disappointment and sorrow; she has to stand firm and to persevere, in spite of disedification and of the absence of that appreciation of herself which she may expect; she will have to put up with what is hard for flesh and blood to endure; and she may often experience the loss of sensible devotion. It

has happened sometimes that, when the reality of all this has been experienced and verified, religious, disabused of their erroneous notions, and disappointed in their glowing expectations, have felt disheartened; and their fervour, not having sufficient solidity and stability, has given way. Before long their conduct became very different from what it had been; they seemed to become reckless. How explain this, except by the fact that they have lapsed into a state of tepidity?

Tepidity is met with in the case of other religious who are wanting in a lively faith. Some are occasionally to be met with of a too material cast of mind, who are not easily moved by the beautiful lessons which are the subject of their meditations; who seem stolid as to any manifestation of devotion; and who look upon observance as very good for novices and others of the devout class, but as not binding so much on themselves. Perhaps these religious wish to be regarded as strong-minded or large-minded; but would they not more accurately describe their dispositions if they said that they were callous? They expose themselves to much delusion. There is not in these callous religious that reality of religious virtue which they pretend to have. Without humility, submissiveness, piety and observance, how can a religious be said to be solidly virtuous? The pretensions of such religious are only a cloak for their want of fervour, and for their self-opiniatedness and self-will; and the condition of tepidity into which they have fallen becomes, alas! to them as a second nature hard to be got rid of, particularly as

they are very likely unwilling to acknowledge that they are open to the charge of being tepid.

Other religious are at times to be met with who weary of the monotony of the religious life; this weariness is one of the widest gateways opening into the land of the tepid. Such religious catch at every kind of excuse for their conduct while they are treading their weary way in the bleak region of tepidity and neglect. Now it is a pretended impossibility to comply with the arrangements of superiors; at another time it is a complaint of unequal distribution of labour; often indisposition or want of time is advanced, or the supposed clashing of duties, or the not having understood the command. It is, however, strange that the fervent members of the community can fulfil their duties and attend their exercises without having to find excuses such as these. The tepid religious who make them become in the course of time confirmed in their condition of tepidity. What happens then? They make little of the obligations of their state, they adopt lax views of the requirements of the religious life, they look for sensible comforts, they seek secular friendships, they have but little heart in complying with the duties marked out for them, piety becomes distasteful, the Holy Sacraments are not duly appreciated, and negligence marks a great deal of their conduct. Alas! where in their case are the fruits of sanctification and the merits of holy living? Where the edification which our Lord says they should give: 'So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify

your Father who is in heaven'? Moreover, these tepid religious do not look into themselves, they are unwilling to believe that they are in the state of tepidity, and they do not wish their way of acting to be interfered with. They resemble in their blindness the Bishop of Laodicea, who said to himself: 'I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing.' Note how he had closed his eyes to his true condition, for our Lord's message to him was: 'Thou knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.'

Besides those who fall into a condition of tepidity because of discouragement, of callousness, or of spiritual weariness, there are also religious who become tepid because of the withholding of special graces, consequent upon the frequent commission of deliberate venial sins. When a religious falls from time to time into sin, owing to frailty or some special temptation, sad as her fall may be, confusion and remorse quickly do their work and lead her to repentance; and the saying of St. Bernard proves to be true, that the religious 'rises more quickly.' After her fall she strives to make amends by increased dutifulness. But when a religious commits venial sin, and repeats it, and even after her confession employs little or no effort to correct herself, how different is the case! A habit of sin is formed, infidelity to grace becomes usual, and confusion and remorse gradually die out. It is not surprising that a religious pursuing conduct such as this, while not deprived of the graces necessary to enable her to follow her vocation, should yet be denied those

special graces of enlightenment, attraction to piety, love of mortification, and devotedness to the religious life, which are bestowed upon the fervent, and which support and console the fervent, and enable them to persevere in fidelity to the grace of their vocation. It is not surprising that, such special graces being withheld from this religious, as well in punishment of her falls as because she does nothing to merit them, and that, proving herself unfaithful to the other graces offered to her to save her from her falls and to help her to amend, her soul should before very long sink into that miserable condition of torpidness, indifference, and unfaithfulness, which is known as the state of tepidity. This religious will, while she remains unconverted, go further and further from the confines of fervour, every step bringing her nearer to those of mortal sin. She will have an ill-regulated conscience, and her sensitiveness regarding sin will perhaps become so dull that she will come at last to say to herself before she commits a fault, 'This is not a mortal sin.' To this religious duty will become a burden, she will not have her heart in her work, and she may even lose her love of her vocation. Does not the fear come upon us, while we consider her sad case, that she may eventually fall into some grave fault? We remember how our Lord's message to the Bishop of Laodicea contained these words: 'Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth.' They should convince us of the gravity of tepidity when persevered in.

From the picture thus far drawn of tepid religious,

we may conclude that, although they have not actually retracted their consecration of themselves to God, or failed in any grave matter in keeping their vows, they are yet wanting in much that renders the religious life meritorious, and they expose themselves to disaster. Ruffinus* says that as flies keep away from a vessel which is burning hot, but settle on one which is only warm, so the devils leave alone religious who are on fire with Divine love, but sport with and molest those who are tepid. It should not be matter for surprise, then, if a tepid religious is seen to be disedifying, immortified, dissipated, unspiritual, and wanting in exactitude, dutifulness, piety, and generosity. It is not, however, pretended that all these lamentable consequences follow in every case of tepidity, or that they are seen in the same degree in all who are tepid; but it is unnecessary to stay to particularize or make distinctions.

Enough has been said to enable you to form a sufficiently clear notion of what tepidity is, and to lead you to conceive a dread of becoming tepid. You have seen some of the causes which bring religious into the condition of tepidity; what shall we now say of the means which should be employed by them if they would rise out of that sad condition?

It must be premised that there are special difficulties and obstacles in the way, owing to the stubborn character of this spiritual disease. When we say that a religious has formed a habit of tepidity, or that her condition is one of tepidity; that she

* Quoted by Corn. a Lap. in Rom. xii. 11.

has adopted many false notions about her own dispositions and about her duties; that she has a certain sense of security as to her conduct because she does not intend to commit mortal sin; that her reverence for what is holy has become lessened, owing to familiarity and to a tepid use of the Sacraments: that she has lost much of the spirit of prayer and recollection; that, instead of generously meeting the calls of duty and the claims of charity, she is so ready with excuses to shirk labour, and possibly that the friendship of seculars plays some part in her undutifulness—when, I say, we take all these matters into consideration, we must admit that the difficulties of shaking off apathy, callousness, torpor, and remissness, and of returning to fervour, are great. But call to mind with confidence our Lord's reply to the disciples when they had said, 'Who, then, can be saved?' 'With men,' He answered, 'this is impossible; but with God all things are possible' (St. Matt. xix. 26). If our Lord has 'come to seek and to save that which was lost' (St. Luke xix. 10), 'that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting' (St. John iii. 15); if He is the Good Shepherd who seeks the sheep that has strayed, and carries it home rejoicing (St. Luke xv. 6), will He not be mindful of tepid souls who, entering into themselves, recognise their unfaithfulness to grace, and the unworthy and ungenerous service which they have offered Him? Yes, we believe that He will heed them; that, though He may reproach them, it will be to draw them back; and that He will not deny them the graces they need

to correspond with His call to renewed fervour in His service. We have a striking proof of His compassion towards the tepid, and of His desire for their conversion, in the case of the Bishop of Laodicea. In His message to this Bishop He upbraided him, as we have seen, but only with a view to awaken his sleeping conscience; and He threatened him, but only to move him to repentance and amendment. Oh, what hope, then, the tepid may entertain that our merciful and loving Saviour will help them to quit the dreary region of tepidity and re-enter the holy land of fervour and dutifulness!

What means, then, should they employ in order to return to fervour? Let us, of course, suppose that they have already determined to rise out of their state of tepidity; for this determination is an essentially necessary disposition of the will, without which remedies will be unavailing. An earnest effort is needed to cope with this spiritual malady. We will consider only three means—exterior observance, the Holy Sacraments, and prayer or devotion.

The tepid in many cases fail in regularity or observance; they therefore need the salutary discipline of exterior observance. How meritorious to a religious is her constant compliance with the regulations in force in her community, and her dutiful performance of her religious exercises! By this fidelity of observance she not only gains the merit of obedience, but she also saves herself from many faults, such as dissipation, loss of time, useless gossiping and idleness. Religious seeking to return from tepidity to fervour need this discipline with all

its advantages, and they should be careful not to allow their own whims or disrelish to interfere with their faithful submission to it. It will enable them to spend their time wisely, and will restrain their own unprofitable waywardness.

In the second place, while regulating their exterior conduct in this way, the tepid should give very careful attention to their reception of the Holy Sacraments, as to their preparation, manner of receiving, and thanksgiving. They particularly need the sacramental graces which the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist bestow. Penance brings to their souls cleansing, and it gives them grace to preserve them against relapse; the Holy Eucharist nourishes and fortifies them, and enkindles in them the warmth of Divine charity. These benefits are precisely what are needed to correct habits of sin or undutifulness, and to overcome indifference and remissness.

In the last place, religious striving to rise from tepidity should cultivate the spirit of prayer. This spirit will make their meditations more profitable: it will help them to walk in God's presence; and it will lead them often to raise their hearts to God. What a stimulus to fervour habits of prayer will prove! The words will come to the lips, 'O my God, I do all for Thee,' 'O my God, I love Thee: help me to please Thee at all times,' and such-like ejaculations. Will not God be attentive to them, and bless those who thus offer Him their love and service? The spirit of prayer will also lead these religious to practise particular devotions, such as

devotion to the Sacred Heart, to the Passion, and to our Blessed Lady. How beneficial this, too, will be! Tepidity will be overcome, and will disappear under the influence of the warmth of all this devotion.

While religious are tepid, they are denied special graces, and much of their labour is profitless. Even as God treated the Jews when they neglected the building of the second temple, withholding His favours, so does He treat negligent religious. He said to the Jews by His prophet Aggeus: 'Therefore the heavens over you were staid from giving dew, and the earth was hindered from yielding her fruits' (Ag. i. 10). But when the Jews, stirred by God's instigation, had taken up the work in earnest, then the message came to them by His prophet: 'I am with you, saith the Lord'; and when they had laid the foundations of the temple His message was: 'From this day I will bless you' (ii. 20). Thus, too, will God turn again to tepid religious when, corresponding with grace, they are renewed in fervour. The flame of their charity, which has been dull and flickering, will again burn brightly, activity will revive, greater merit will be gained, more spiritual fruit will be harvested, and God will be more glorified by their service and works. 'Let our strength be the law of justice; for that which is feeble is found to be nothing worth' (Wisd. ii. 11). Restored to a more perfect state of mind, they will deplore the spiritual loss resulting from their tepidity; and they will recognise that they must gain strength by being faithful in complying with the duties of

their state. For this change in their dispositions they will praise God with gratitude and joy. 'It is He,' says the prophet, 'that giveth strength to the weary, and increaseth force and might to them that are not' (Isa. xl. 29).

'The charity of many shall grow cold;' but not among religious, not among you. Oh, be on your guard against discouragement, callousness, weariness, and habitual deliberate faults of any kind; do not place obstacles to grace. Look ever to the goal of your calling, strive ever to tend to religious perfection, let the good pleasure of your heavenly Spouse be more to you than any other consideration, and then will tepidity have no place in your conduct. If in the days of your remissness God had reason to say to you as to Jerusalem, 'She hath not hearkened to the voice, neither hath she received discipline . . . she drew not near to her God' (Soph. iii. 2), may He, upon your return to fervour, say to you, for your consolation and encouragement: 'Fear not; let not thy hands be weakened: the Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, He will save; He will rejoice over thee with gladness' (iii. 16, 17).

## VI.

### *RELIGIOUS VOCATION.*

'I will espouse thee to Me for ever.'—OSEE ii. 19.

THESE words, by which the prophet describes our Lord's gracious call of His Church to an everlasting alliance, may be applied also to that call by which He deigns to invite the individual member of His Church, a faithful soul, to espouse Him—that is, to pledge her vows to Him, to take Him for her portion and her only Lord.

When you left the world to enter into religion, you took a step of the greatest importance, one of happy bearing upon your future destiny both in this and in the next world. Perhaps you but dimly realized at the time that you were following a supernatural attraction and guidance; but so it was, for you were following, or corresponding with, a special vocation. The heavenly Spouse said: 'I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness' (Osee ii. 14). You responded cheerfully and generously to the secret voice which invited you to leave the world and to embrace the holy state of religion: 'She shall sing there according to the days of her youth. . . . I will espouse thee to Me for ever' (ii. 15, 19).

God's dealings with His creatures are real, although they may be secret; with some they are dealings of preference. As there are different hierarchies of blessed spirits in heaven, some, so to say, nearer to the throne than others, and fulfilling a higher ministry, so are there various hierarchies of God's servants on earth, some drawn further away than others from what is material and commonplace in life, and more devoted to the spiritual interests of God's kingdom in this world. Among the vocations of preference there stands in the foremost rank the vocation to the religious life. This is the vocation which has been vouchsafed to you. As God of old loved Israel among the nations, so does He love religious among and above His other servants. 'Yea,' He said to Israel, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee' (Jer. xxxi. 3). Happily, you have corresponded with the grace of this vocation, inasmuch as you have left the world, and have consecrated yourselves to God and to His holy service in religion. You have still to correspond with it in leading a truly religious life, keeping back nothing of the sacrifice which your heavenly Spouse demands of you.

Call to mind how God rewarded Abraham when this holy patriarch failed in no respect in the sacrifice which was demanded of him. God required him to sacrifice his only begotten son, Isaac. Abraham arose at once in the night-time to execute God's orders—in more than heroic obedience, to sacrifice to God in the offering of his son the dearest affections of his heart, and what was more to him than all his

worldly possessions. On the third day of the journey he reached the place of sacrifice; he dressed the altar, he bound his son, he raised the sacrificing sword. God was satisfied; an angel stayed the blow, and another victim was found; but Abraham received the reward of his religious act. 'By My own self have I sworn, saith the Lord: because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only begotten son for My sake: I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven. . . . And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed My voice' (Gen. xxii. 16-18).

What rich blessings yours, too, will be if only, in following your vocation, you correspond in all things with God's designs in the sacrifice which He asks of you. To gain these blessings you must offer yourselves in a holy and generous sacrifice on the altar of religion. They will not be for yourselves alone—'I will bless thee'—but also for those to whom you do good, those whom you benefit by edification and by your charitable works.

It is proper during your annual retreat to call to mind your obligations in view of your vocation, to dwell therefore upon what this privileged vocation is, and what it demands of you; upon what the perfection is which it requires you to aspire to, and to labour to attain. As religious you have the honour and the happiness of belonging to God. What does this mean? What obligations does it impose on you?

You have, in correspondence with your vocation, passed from the ordinary way of a Christian life into

a special state or condition of life, in which you are bound to tend to perfection; you have entered this new and special state to remain in it. You have bound yourselves, over and above keeping the commandments, to observe the evangelical counsels, which are not binding on all Christians; and you cannot now withdraw from your obligations without a breach of your vows made to God, without therefore making a retrograde movement offensive to God and altogether unworthy of yourselves. 'No man,' our Lord said, 'putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God' (St. Luke ix. 62). This stability in the state of life to which you have been called is insured by that very solemn and binding act, freely and voluntarily entered into by yourselves, by which you undertook to adopt the religious counsels. That act was your religious profession, involving vows made to God to observe poverty, chastity, and obedience in the religious institute which received you among its members.

Your religious obligations did not, however, begin and end with the making of your vows. With this state and condition of life, and with these solemn engagements, corresponds the manner of living marked out for you by the rules and constitutions of your institute.* Exercises of piety and devout practices prescribed by the rule have their place in your daily routine; and you have also to devote

* 'Tenetur religiosus ex vi suæ professionis habere propositum servandi regulam (quæ fundatur in voto vitæ regularis).'—SUAREZ, 'De Obl. Rel.,' c. i., p. 15.

yourselves to such works of zeal or charity as have been undertaken by your institute. You yourselves, by your place of abode, by your habit, by your deportment—in a word, by your profession—recognise your obligation to a more perfect life; and by these same tokens you give others to understand that you have undertaken this obligation.

But the essential obligation of the religious state is the observance of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. By these vows you remove from yourselves, and you place yourselves at a distance from, what constitute the chief obstacles to the love of God and a perfect life. The Apostle declares these dangers and obstacles to be the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 St. John ii. 16). By the practice of poverty you restrain yourselves from the concupiscence of the eyes; by the observance of chastity you overcome the concupiscence of the flesh; and by obedience and religious submission you are saved from the pride of life.

Religion and piety should lead you to appreciate highly these sacred vows, and to fulfil faithfully the holy obligations which you have contracted by them. You have put on the livery of the King of kings, or, you may indeed say, the bridal robe of His spouses; you have signed a bond which will bring in to you constant and precious treasures of merit; and you have entered into a compact which is as glorious as it is meritorious. Take comfort now from these words of God by His prophet: 'They that shall keep My sabbaths, and shall choose the things that please Me, and shall hold fast My covenant: I will

give to them in My house, and within My walls, a place, and a name better than sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name which shall never perish' (Isa. lvi. 4, 5). How wisely it is arranged that, at the close of the retreat, you should with great solemnity renew your vows! In order to enter thoroughly into the spirit of that renewal, for which your retreat is a preparation, you would do well, with due reflection, to call to mind what you have vowed, and what are the sacred character and the binding force of your vows. You have vowed to live poor, chaste, and obedient under the yoke of religion until death in the institute to which you have the great happiness to belong. The die has been cast, the vow taken, the solemn engagement entered into, and Solomon says: 'If thou hast vowed anything to God, defer not to pay it. . . . It is much better not to vow, than after a vow not to perform the things promised' (Eccles. v. 3, 4).

With the holy character of your vocation—a vocation in keeping with the self-denying counsels of the Gospel, and one altogether unworldly—should correspond your mode of life, your detachment from the world, its goods and pleasures. It is not enough to wear the habit of your institute; there must be a religious actuality in your character, dispositions, views, sentiments, and conduct, corresponding with the serious obligations which the religious state imposes upon you. In other words, dealing only with what is essential, your observance of poverty, chastity, and obedience must not be a sinecure or a pretence, but a true, faithful, and religious fulfilment of the

obligations contracted by these vows. Question yourselves, by way of examination, upon your manner of complying with your duty in this respect. I will suggest in a cursory way some points for examination; others will come readily to your minds.

Having vowed poverty, do you yet seek to surround yourselves with all the comforts and conveniences enjoyed by the rich? Do you put your community to unusual expense to satisfy your demands for various unnecessary articles which you persist in wishing to have? When you receive money for particular expenses, do you use it lavishly in disregard of poverty, or of what your rule lays down? Are you guilty of receiving or giving, borrowing or lending, without being duly authorized?

Having vowed chastity, are you prompt in rejecting from your mind every thought or imagination which is contrary to the holy virtue, and do you check in your senses and affections whatever may endanger it?

Having vowed obedience, are you truly obedient? Are you, perhaps, wanting in respectful compliance with the orders of your superior because she is younger than you are, or because you deem her less talented than yourself, or because you find fault with her manner or administration? In matters in which your rule requires you to consult your superior's wishes or receive her sanction, do you ever make arrangements without complying with this wise regulation? Or do you first carry out your projects, and only afterwards, when all but useless, mention the matter to your superior? Are you of the number

of those ill-advised religious who love independence, and thereby deprive themselves of the merit of obedience in much that they do; who wish to refer nothing to their superior, and who seem to say to their superior by their conduct and manner, if not in so many words, 'Only leave me alone, and we shall get on well together'? of those who seem to forget that obedience is of the very essence of the religious life, and that submission is of the very essence of obedience?

Keep close in your observance to the line marked out by the vow and spirit of poverty, and by the vow of holy chastity, and let your religious obedience be that sanctifying compliance and submission which gains merit with God, which consoles your superiors, which edifies your neighbour, and which insures peace to your own conscience.

Your fidelity to your religious obligations will not be without its magnificent recompense. Your state in this world is a state apart; your reward in the world to come will be a reward apart. Take comfort in recalling often to your minds our Lord's words: 'Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My Name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting' (St. Matt. xix. 29). Other words of His addressed particularly to the Apostles have their application to religious: 'I dispose to you, as My Father hath disposed to Me, a kingdom' (St. Luke xxii. 29). Your reward will be according to the extent and perfection of your sacrifice and devotedness. Do not take from

this reward by such faults as undutifulness, neglect, tepidity, sloth, cowardice, self-indulgence, or hypocrisy. You say, and you say truly, 'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance' (Ps. xv. 5); you have embraced the portion of our Lord, to carry out His behest; you are His sworn servants. Fulfil, then, your service, and bear His yoke with all affection, fervour, diligence, and devotedness.

Come now to some further considerations,* which will help you to realize what is required of you, seeing that you belong to God by so special a calling.

The first consideration is this, that, as you now belong to God, you must die to the world. Men have been created and redeemed that they may live for God; they must not submit to any other sovereignty. St. Paul therefore says to all Christians: 'You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God' (Col. iii. 3). A religious should take these words in an especial way to herself. 'You are dead;' but what a happy death is here submitted to, since it leads to union by the life of grace and holiness with your heavenly Spouse! 'Your life is hid with Christ in God.' This is the death to sin and to every unworthy attraction, that glorious death which leads to immortality, according to the Apostle's consoling promise; for he goes on to say: 'When Christ shall appear, who is your life, then you also shall appear with Him in glory' (Col. iii. 4). You must be dead to the world and be hidden as long as Christ shall be hidden; apart from Christ you must be content

* See Père Judde, tome iii., p. 418.

to be—as far as an unspiritual life is concerned, with which you have now no part*—as though you had no being, but only that you may come forth glorious from your voluntary entombment; for when Christ your only Lord shall appear, you too shall then appear, and as He shall then appear in glory, so also shall you appear in glory. Was not this the import of your religious vows? When you pronounced them, you proclaimed an everlasting divorce from the world, and your Lord then espoused you to Himself; thenceforth you were to belong only to Him, to live for Him and in Him. By His Holy Spirit He said to you: 'I will espouse thee to Me for ever.' And these espousals entered into in this world in lowliness and humility shall in the world to come be consummated in glory.

You have therefore done with the world, to return to it no more. You have done with its vanities and frivolities, with its fashions and dissipations, with its riches and comforts, with its turmoil and pleasures, with its aims and gains, with its ambition and honours, and even with its esteem. Do you realize that by this complete renouncement you have become gainers? For, if you have turned your back upon all these matters of worldly consideration, you have entered into the house of God, into the realm of piety, devotion, silence, recollection, self-denial, love of God, and every religious virtue. You are the

* All your works will be spiritualized by your intention, according to St. Paul's direction: 'All whatsoever you do in word or work, do all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Col. iii. 17). See also 1 Cor. x. 31.

servants of God; the voice which you now obey is that Divine voice which brought all things into existence, and which shall yet bring back all men from death to life; that sovereign voice which commands the heavenly host, and which shall sound for ever in sweet melodiousness in the ears of the blessed. It commands your willing service, and you say with Samuel: 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth;' or with the spouse in the Canticles: 'Let Thy voice sound in my ears.'

Not only have you left the world, but the world also has released its hold of you, and renounced its claims upon you. It passes you by, it does not know you; it has buried you, it has consigned you to oblivion such as that of which the psalmist says: 'He hath made me to dwell in darkness as those that have been dead of old' (Ps. cxlii. 3); and now you have no longer any part with it. You are happy in being thus buried, in being thus looked upon as dead to the world. There will yet be a glorious arising, and then, with all who have triumphed in Christ, you will say: 'O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?' (1 Cor. xv. 55).

If you would belong to God, and if you wish to appear among His servants with Christ in glory, you must now die to the world. This is what you have, in the first place, been considering. Look well, therefore, to your affection for your holy vocation, to your spirit of self-denial, and to the true religiousness of your general conduct, so that you may be found faithful in complying with this condition.

It is required of you, in the second place, since you belong in so particular a manner to God, not only that you should die to the world, but also that you should live espoused to Christ. You have the great honour and privilege of being the well-beloved, the spouses of Christ. You must live as such.

Holy Church styles her virginal children the spouses of Christ. To a Virgin Saint she says in her office: 'Veni, sponsa Christi'—Come, O spouse of Christ. Our Blessed Lady is the spouse of the Holy Ghost, the Mother of Christ. 'After her shall virgins be brought to the King' (Ps. xliv. 15). Your ever-blessed Immaculate Mother brought you to her Son, the King of kings, that you might vow your virginity to Him, and now you are espoused by this holy vow to Him. By your consecration to Him in religion you merit that the words which our Lord addressed to His Apostles should be applied also to you: 'You are My friends if you do the things that I command you. I will not now call you servants . . . but I have called you friends' (St. John xv. 14, 15). If you are now the friends, the well-beloved, the spouses of Christ—these are not empty titles—Christ in a remarkable manner shows you His love, and rewards your service and your consecration to Him. You are recipients of special graces, and His delights are to dwell in your heart, and to shower His spiritual benedictions upon you. Do you realize that, since you are now espoused to Him and so wonderfully favoured by Him, to keep your hearts for yourselves would be to offer insult to Him, and to dare to give them to others would be to commit sacrilege? He

demands that you should be wholly His, and this is what you promised when you consecrated yourselves to Him. It follows that your love, your care and attention, your diligence and devotedness, your very lives, should be all for Him.

There are some religious who do not realize the extent of our Lord's claim upon them. They do not give all to Him. Hence the half-heartedness of their affection, the remiss and ungenerous character of their service, the imperfections noticeable in their conduct, the unreal efforts which they make to practise the religious virtues, their impatience under contradictions, their discontent under the sweet and holy yoke of religion, and their dread of death.

Our Lord has called you, as we have just now seen, to belong in an especial manner to Him: 'I will espouse thee to Me for ever.' He is jealous of your heart, and this should make you put a seal upon it. All-great and all-holy as He is, He has deigned to become everything to you. Can you do less than consecrate your whole being to Him? You recognise at once how wicked it would be to drive Him from your heart by grievous sin. How base and unworthy, too, it would be to set your heart through any inordinate affection on anyone or anything less than Himself! If you love others, as indeed you are strictly bound to do, it must be for love of Him, with a supernatural charity. He must be your heart's dearest treasure. 'Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also' (St. Matt. vi. 21). Take care, moreover, not to divert the affections of others from our Lord, either by disedification, by leading them into

imperfections, or by seeking from them any inordinate affection, for our Lord is as jealous of their love as of yours. Your own love is little enough to offer Him, and the love of all others combined would be still inadequate. Do not, therefore, lessen the offering, or be the cause of its being lessened. Manifest ever the devotedness of a spouse, and seek that your Divine Spouse may be held in honour by all. This is what, in the second place, is required of you.

And now, in the third place, and lastly, it behoves you, since you belong to God by so special a calling, to show your zeal for Him by doing service for those who in the world dishonour Him and neglect His service.

Religious, being drawn to a full and fervent love of our Lord, should be zealous for His love and service. They look out into the world, and they are struck sad at seeing how little God is known and loved there. They call to mind the words of David: 'The Lord hath looked down upon the children of men, to see if there be any that understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are become unprofitable together: there is none that doth good, no, not one' (Ps. xiii. 2, 3). The number of men is countless who, indifferent to the supernatural, neglect the service of God for personal interests (as they understand them), for worldly interests, and for sensual gratification, for ease, comfort, and pleasure. But God, to compensate Himself for such wicked and ungrateful conduct, has chosen out of the world those who should dedicate their whole

lives to His service. You are among the number of those who have been selected for this grand vocation. Say, then, with David: 'We Thy people, and the sheep of Thy pasture, will give thanks to Thee for ever' (Ps. lxxviii. 13). 'The dead shall not praise Thee, O Lord: nor any of them that go down to hell. But we that live bless the Lord: from this time now and for ever' (Ps. cxiii. 17, 18). In a humble but devout way strive to make amends, not only for your own sins in the past, but also for the sinful neglect of so many in the world, and for the terrible crimes which cry to heaven, calling for just punishment upon their perpetrators. What dishonour God receives from His own creatures, to whom He has measured out untold blessings! Oh, bring to His service all your fervour and all your devotedness, motived by your desire to make some little compensation for such base conduct. You should not be guided in the character of your service by that which you see offered by many worldly persons or by indifferent religious, but measure what it should be by the claims which God has upon it by reason of His infinite perfections, and by His bounty and love displayed towards you. Be guided, therefore, by the fervour of the service offered by the Saints, and by that of edifying religious. Let your service, then, come as near as it can to that fervent worship of the Blessed in heaven who unceasingly proclaim God's praises, while with all the intense ardour of their unremitting love they do His holy will.

Let these considerations upon the obligations of the religious state, and upon the unworldly and

fervent lives which you should strive ever to lead, attach you more and more to your holy vocation. The religious life has no poetry beyond and besides its own actuality, and this is enough—to belong to God and to live for God. But how much it means to be good religious! The graces you need to make you such will be measured out to you unfailingly if only you love your vocation and endeavour to fulfil its duties. Pray for courage and perseverance; your heavenly Spouse is ever at hand. He has taken away all earthly props; you must lean only on Him. His grace is sufficient for you. Go on cheerfully, and when the end comes, may you hear His voice calling you from labour to rest, from death to life, from the contest to the triumph and the crown: 'Come from Libanus, my spouse . . . come, thou shalt be crowned' (Cant. iv. 8).

## VII.

### *DISEDIFICATION.*

'It must needs be that scandals come.'—ST. MATT. xviii. 7.

HUMAN perversity in some degree is met with everywhere; and wherever it is, it has a tendency, either directly or indirectly, to infect others. This infection is termed scandal or disedification. Charity demands that we shall not injure our neighbour; and no injury is so serious as that which is inflicted on his soul, on his moral being. Scandal may also arise, not in the first instance from any inherent perversity in our own action, but from its becoming perverse by reason of its consequences as regards our neighbour; it may sometimes happen that when there is no adequate reason for it, we should be bound to refrain from performing an action, if we knew that it would give scandal to our neighbour (1 Cor. viii. 13 and x. 28).

Living, then, as you are under this condition of things, you would do well to question yourselves during the retreat not only as to your spiritual progress, or as to any spiritual deterioration, but also as to the influence of your conduct upon others. You do not live alone, nor are you responsible for

yourselves only. You may not say with the murderer Cain, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' There are, alas! in the world many spiritual murderers; even as Cain brought death to the body of Abel, these bring spiritual injury and spiritual death to the souls of their brethren. To them God says: 'Where is thy brother? What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth to Me from the earth.' When adventurous travellers scale the snow-covered mountains, they are bound to one another by a strong rope, so if one of them falls, his fall affects the others who are in company with him—the safety of all who are making the perilous ascent with him is jeopardized. Even so will it be with you. If you commit a public offence, if you are wanting in your duty, or if you are remiss or disedifying religious, you will do harm not only to your own souls, but also to the souls of others; you will jeopardize their safety as well as your own; you may cause them to fall when you fall yourselves. Perhaps the subject of scandal and disedification does not generally receive as much thought and examination as should, considering its importance, be bestowed upon it. How many persons there are who, in making their confession, acknowledge their sins, but fail to accuse themselves fully—if at all—of the scandal which they have thereby given? In your way through life you leave the imprint of your footsteps. Your way may be straight to the holy goal of your best desires; you may be able to say with David, 'My foot hath stood in the direct way' (Ps. xxv. 12), and you will thus

gain the reward of the good which you will be the means of doing to others by edification; or you may go aside or go backwards, and have to acknowledge with David at another time, 'I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost' (Ps. cxviii. 176), or with Daniel when he made his confession to God: 'We have sinned . . . we have gone aside from Thy commandments' (Dan. ix. 5); and in such a case you may mislead others, and be responsible for their delinquencies. Do you need any warning about so serious a responsibility? Have your footprints misled any of your sisters in religion? Do not wait for the time when our Lord will cleanse His house and kingdom of evil-doers, according to His foretelling: 'The Son of Man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all scandals and them that work iniquity' (St. Matt. xiii. 41); but now, while the light and grace of the retreat are available, utilize them to help you to discontinue and correct whatever there may be in your conduct that is likely to disedify or scandalize others, or give them bad example.

Our Lord has said: 'Woe to the world because of scandals. For it must needs be that scandals come; but nevertheless woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh' (St. Matt. xviii. 7). You are thus warned and put on your guard against others; take care that you give no reason to others to have to guard themselves against you. It may almost be said that scandal infects the air we breathe, but, happily, in religion it is not so. Yet at times some disedification is given. Disedification should be

classified with what is generically termed scandal. Let us therefore try to understand what is meant by giving scandal.

A man is said to give scandal when, whether by act or counsel, by conduct, or in any other way, he becomes the determining cause of another's sin. The sin may be committed with or without his co-operation, but he has in some way become the cause of it, or has furnished the occasion of it, so that, even though he may not have given any actual co-operation, he will yet have incurred the guilt and malice of sin, and he will be said to have given scandal. In many cases the giver of scandal does actually co-operate in the sin which has been caused through his scandal. This happens, for instance, in the case of a drunkard who leads another into habits of intemperance. Scandal is said to occur when an act that is faulty (*minus rectus*) is performed which tends to, or gives rise to, the spiritual injury or ruin of another, so as to cause him to depart from the path of rectitude, to lessen his sense of rectitude, or to confirm him in views or conduct which are wrong. The sin of scandal would be incurred also by words spoken, advice given, or duty omitted, involving the same results. The scandal would be said to be direct if the spiritual injury to another was not only foreseen, but also intended; it would be said to be indirect if the spiritual injury, not directly intended, was foreseen as likely to result, and if it was not prevented, although foreseen.

Let me put this doctrine before you in more particular application to actual cases of scandal. A

man would be guilty of giving scandal if by his conduct or speech he caused others to decline from the love of virtue; if he caused them to break the commandments, or to neglect the duties of their state; if, by his bad conduct, he brought discredit upon a state of life blessed by God, or caused others to disrespect or speak evil of a community, or religious order, or other combination of persons worthy of respect. In all such cases he would incur the guilt of giving scandal, whether he foresaw these consequences as certain to follow, or only feared that they might probably result. Such consequences as these just mentioned usually follow when the action or conduct which gives the scandal is public, particularly if the guilty party bears the character of being devout, or is bound by his state to cultivate religion and piety and to give edification; for in cases of this kind the scandal is more grievous. A religious would therefore be guilty of giving scandal if her conduct were such as to bring religion into disrepute, to give a bad name to her institute or community, or to cause her sisters to fall away from the fulfilment of the duties of their state and calling.

I content myself with giving this explanation of what scandal is without entering into a discussion as to the number of sins which in given circumstances would be committed by the man guilty of scandal, or as to the degree of malice which would be attached to scandal in various cases; or, again, as to the obligations under which the scandal-giver would lie in this delicate and important matter, by reason of the charity which he owes to the neighbour

whom he has injured. Finally, I do not pretend to point out or decide in how many cases the malice of scandal would be found, but I speak of the view which should be taken of scandal whenever and wherever it actually is.

Wherever scandal is found, it is as an infectious disease; it does harm not only to the man who is guilty of giving it, but it also does harm, or threatens harm, to others. The scandal adds to his own moral responsibility, that is, increases the guilt and punishment attached to the sin which causes the scandal, and also involves him in the serious consequence of the obligation of repairing as far as possible the harm he does to others through the scandal he gives. The giver of scandal deserves to be styled a worker of evil.

Happily, such grave scandals as serious disobedience or contempt of authority, enmities or contentions, or disorders to bring religion into disrepute, are so exceptional among religious that it would be quite unnecessary and out of place to dwell upon them. It may, however, be useful, if only to warn you against them, to allude to faults of disedification which may at times be met with even in communities where regularity reigns. Traces of human frailty, if not of human perversity, may be discovered even among well-meaning and otherwise devout religious. Where such frailty or perversity is attended by injury to others, it is termed disedification.

Religious should be very watchful over their words and their conduct, lest by them they give disedification to their sisters in religion, or to seculars. Their

disedification sometimes will only cause others pain and worry; but sometimes, too, it will lead others into faults or remissness, to a loss of piety and fervour, or to the lessening of their love of their vocation. It may happen, also, that disedifying conduct, if persevered in, will lead in time to very grave results, both to the religious who is guilty of it and to those who are injuriously affected by it, and consequently to the community in which it occurs. I will particularize as causes of disedification, faults of temper, non-observance of rule, and discontent.

Undoubtedly religious give edification by their virtuous lives, and seculars expect to be edified by them. Perhaps seculars are too exacting, but it is better that they should expect more than look for less, as their expectations read a lesson to religious, teaching them how holy their state is held to be, and what virtue should adorn the lives of those who enjoy the happiness of having embraced it. The absence from a religious, of that virtue which is expected in her by her sisters in religion, and by seculars, not only disappoints them, but often it also disedifies them. Consider, too, how the absence of a virtue is discerned: it is known by the appearance in the religious of some faultiness which is opposed to the virtue. Thus, the absence of meekness is discerned when it is noticed that the religious gets angry upon some small provocation; the absence of a kindly disposition is discovered when the religious is seen to be unduly severe or harsh; the absence of gentleness and of a thoughtful charity is noticed when it is observed that the religious is snappish or

surly, selfish, and wanting in consideration for the feelings and reasonable requirements of others. The faults of temper, then, in a religious, which may give disedification, are anger, undue severity, asperity, surliness, and selfishness. It is not pretended that they do more than surprise or pain others; it is not likely that a religious in whom they are observable will lead others by her example into similar faults; but it is possible that others may excuse themselves when they are guilty of such faults by calling to mind or adducing her example. A child might say: 'If I am bad-tempered, so is Sister So-and-so; if I get angry sometimes, so does she.' A religious should bear in mind that she has made profession of religious virtue, that the habit she wears betokens the virtues which should be manifest in her conduct, and that others look up to her for good example. By word and example she should, within the sphere of action marked out for her by obedience, inculcate the lessons of virtue and holy living taught by our Divine Lord. She should therefore watch over her conduct wherever she may be, so as not only to avoid giving disedification, but also so as to be a model to others, especially to the young, just as Ruth was 'an example of virtue in Ephrata' (Ruth iv. 21).

Another cause of disedification is non-observance of rule or disregard of religious discipline. This faultiness disedifies your sisters in religion, and if known to seculars, it may cause them much disedification. It is a faultiness which will not only shock the members of your community, but which may also lead some of them to imitate your example, or

to hold the rule in less esteem. The rule of your institute is the rule of every member of it; you should respect it and be attached to it, as being something which is your own. The rule of your institute is also the bond of your religious family; the existence, the well-being, and the honour of your institute depend upon its faithful observance; you cannot, as members of the institute, be indifferent to its existence and well-being, so you should not be indifferent to the faithful observance of its rule.

These considerations should suffice to make you observe your holy rules dutifully; but remember, too, that you have yourselves undertaken to observe them. When you sought admission to the institute, you accepted its rule and promised to obey it; so that if you now disregard its injunctions, you prove yourself unfaithful to your engagement.

Your holy rules lay down for you that religious observance which you must follow if you would be known in your communities and to seculars as members of your institute. They have been given to you, with ecclesiastical approbation, to be your rule of life; they are the bulwark of the religious state, and of the vows which constitute its essence. By their observance you will sanctify your lives, and lay up for yourselves a rich store of merit. The rules being, then, of such great importance, you cannot neglect or disregard them without thereby causing detriment to your religious perfection, and without running counter to the wise designs which your holy founder or foundress had in drawing them up, and without depriving yourselves of the many blessings

and advantages which would result from their observance; and furthermore, if your neglect or fault be public, disedification will necessarily be given to your sisters in religion, and to all who remark your culpable want of observance.

Let me call your earnest attention to another consideration. It is this: there is a particular essence of danger in non-observance, namely, that, as your rules do not bind under pain of sin, you may make light of neglecting them, and you may continue your non-observance of them, and thus come finally to contract habits of non-observance. Now, habits of non-observance in the case of some of the more important requirements of your rule — on account of the disregard for the rule itself which such habits will eventually give rise to—can scarcely be without sin, for you undoubtedly sin when you are guilty of contempt of the rule. Consider also that others, led by your example, might fall into the same systematic neglect of rule, and injury would in this way be done to religion itself; and whosoever causes injury to religion itself is certainly guilty of sin. I have put these considerations before you to help you to understand how unworthy on the part of a religious, and how detrimental to religion, that disedification is which is caused by non-observance of rule, and by disregard of religious discipline. Does a religious pretend that no disedification is given when she has no regard for silence, but is heard speaking everywhere and at all hours, when the rule imposes silence; or when she absents herself without justifiable reason from the meditations

and other pious exercises of the community; or when she frequently rises late in the morning without excuse, and even fails to assist at Holy Mass; or when she continually shirks her duties, and thereby upsets the arrangements of her superior and of the community; or when through a spirit of dissipation she disturbs others in the discharge of their duties? Wherein does she show herself to be a true religious, if this is the idea which she entertains of the obligations of her state of life? How her conduct will tend to lower the standard of religion! Is it not almost certain to affect younger religious injuriously? And if followed by others, how great in time will be the injury which religion itself will suffer from it! Such conduct must necessarily be disedifying, and it may also be infectious, and therefore deserve to be termed scandalous. What a source of sorrow and anxiety such conduct will be to superiors, and of danger to younger religious! To such a disedifying religious is applicable the admonition of St. Paul: 'Know you not that a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump? Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste' (1 Cor. v. 6, 7).

Besides faults of temper and non-observance of rule, disedification is sometimes given by discontent. Religious are at times to be met with who appear always to have a grievance of which to complain, a grievance which no efforts of their superiors seem capable of removing. Such religious invariably hold their dissatisfaction to be justifiable. If their discontent remained locked up in their own minds, it would have unpleasant effects upon their own spirit

and life. They would feel out of sorts and dispirited, they would fret over their grievance, and they would enter into the performance of their duties either unwillingly or only in a half-hearted way. All this would take away from their happiness and peace of mind. But these discontented religious must communicate their grievances to others, and while seeking sympathy, they will also seek to impregnate the minds of others with the sourness and disaffection which fill their own. Thus they become in a community a cause of disedification. If they succeed in gaining influence over others, the results most likely to follow will be a weakening of respect and affection for the superior, and a want of confidence in the wisdom or justice of her arrangements, grumbling and murmuring, the formation of parties in the community, secret caballing, disunion, and mistrust. It is not pretended that every case of discontent will develop all these serious results, but experience teaches how infectious discontent is; and if it should spread and grow strong in a community, nearly all these results may follow. Discontent, when not combated and suppressed, arouses passion; and when passion becomes inflamed, it grows stronger and more fierce as with an inherent activity, and communicates on all sides both its heat and its destructiveness. It is scarcely necessary to ask what the causes are which give rise to disaffection. What would cause it in one weak religious would not influence another. Much depends upon individual training and disposition. I will, however, mention some causes. Disaffection may arise in a religious

from jealousy, from a conviction of not being duly appreciated, or of not being justly dealt with, from overestimation of her abilities or her claims for confidence, from dislike of the superior or belief in her incompetence, from dislike of the duties to be fulfilled, from unwillingness to submit dutifully to authority, or from a falling away of her love of her vocation. In some cases it is noticeable that so unreasonable and stubborn is a religious when labouring under this malady of disaffection that even those in whom she places confidence are unable to cope successfully with it, or to convince the religious of the incongruity or danger of her conduct. She may continue this conduct even after she perceives that the malady, if not remedied or kept under, is likely not only to be a cause of disedification, but also to spread and become a source of scandal. It might even gratify her if it were to spread. A study of this spirit of disaffection should convince you of the necessity of being on your guard against admitting it into your own hearts, and against fanning the flames of it in the hearts of others by giving it any countenance.

Happily, you edify by your lives and by your works, but, as our Lord says, 'It must needs be that scandals come.' It is possible that disedification, if not absolute scandal, may be met with from time to time in your communities. Try not to take scandal; try to explain away whatever wrong you may think you perceive in the conduct of others. Avoid communicating unfavourable impressions to others, except prudence counsels the notification of

them to the superior, but be careful yourselves not to give rise to disedification. If you have any reason to believe that any conduct of yours is disedifying, do not delay to correct it. Scandal must be done away with if you would not incur God's anger and His punishment, if you would not be involved in another's sin, and if you would not be a stumbling-block in the way of your neighbour's sanctification and salvation. Our Lord teaches that, no matter what it may cost you, you must remove all scandal. 'If thy right eye scandalize thee,' He says, 'pluck it out and cast it from thee. If thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee' (St. Matt. v. 29, 30). If you must at such a cost remove from yourselves the cause of sin, what obligation is there not upon you to remove the cause of sin from others when that cause is your own unworthy conduct, or your remissness and neglect!

The question also arises, if you are conscious of having given disedification, as to what reparation you have made. Who is there among you who does not, by reason of disedification given in one way or another, lie under the obligation of now giving all the edification that she can in order to make reparation for it?

If there is any deterioration in the religious spirit and in the religious observance which exists among you, let each religious say how far she is individually responsible for it; and if amendment does not take place, let her say for what continuance of evil result she will be held accountable. The consequences of scandal and disedification may be termed an 'un-

known quantity.' They may spread to many souls, and continue for many years.

Let it be yours, not to disedify, but to edify; not to add the weight of your words and example to the side of evil, but to the holy cause of religion, virtue, and piety. Let it, then, be yours to emulate the bright example of the Saints and of edifying religious, and, walking ever in the holy way of dutifulness, to 'let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven' (St. Matt. v. 16).

## THIRD DAY.

### VIII.

*TEMPTATIONS.*

'Prepare thy soul for temptation.'—Ecclus. ii. 1.

The Christian's path through life is ever beset by trials and temptations; the devout religious reckons temptations one of her greatest trials. She sought in religion the harbour of peace, but she finds that the tempests of temptation have access even there. With all her faith, she finds it hard to believe that temptations are not an evil, yet she knows that St. James says: 'Count it all joy when you shall fall into divers temptations' (i. 2). Her misgiving and uneasiness, however, when examined, are found to arise, not because she fails to recognise the wisdom and real goodness of God's dispensation in sending or permitting temptations, but from her consciousness of her own weakness. Perhaps she thus manifests some want of faith and confidence; with St. Paul she asks that the temptation may depart from her; but should she not rest assured when she calls to mind how, when St. Paul prayed for relief from his

temptation, our Lord answered him: 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is made perfect in infirmity' (2 Cor. xii. 9)? Should she not take courage when she reflects that God's design in this form of trial is to test her love and to afford her an opportunity of present merit, which will be succeeded by future reward? Should it not also comfort her to know that, as far as she is concerned, there is no evil in the temptation while she resists it? The evil would be in her own act in yielding to it, and this, by God's grace, she is determined not to do.

It is not, however, surprising that temptations should give rise in a religious, and in every Christian, to a sense of misgiving and uneasiness, for the religious calls to mind the falls of Adam and Eve, of David and Solomon, of St. Peter, and of others, and she is perhaps also conscious of past weakness on her own part under temptation. She knows that the history of the falling away of men from duty and virtue begins with some temptation. 'Every man,' St. James says, 'is tempted by his own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured' (i. 14). Concupiscence here means man's depraved inclination towards what is contrary to right reason and the law of God. The great and the good have fallen when they have not resisted temptation. Although the religious may call all this to mind, she must not allow her sense of misgiving and uneasiness to lessen her spirit of generosity in being willing to submit to this severe form of trial, or to weaken her confidence in God's protection and assistance.

The Spirit of Evil, who is described in the Holy

Scriptures as a roaring lion going about seeking whom he may devour (1 St. Pet. v. 8), did not leave unmolested even our Divine Lord Himself; he has also assailed the Saints in every age of the Church. Our Lord told St. Peter how great the temptation was which had been designed for this Apostle when He said to him: 'Behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat' (St. Luke xxii. 31). The good Christian and the pious religious must therefore expect to suffer temptation: to be forewarned is to be forearmed. The Holy Ghost forewarns us in the Holy Scriptures, for there we read how the Archangel Raphael said to Tobias: 'Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee' (Tob. xii. 13). In Ecclesiasticus we read: 'When thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation' (ii. 1). And St. Paul wrote to St. Timothy saying: 'All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' (2 Tim. iii. 12). During this retreat, therefore, you would do well to take a right view of temptations, and to consider your duty under this form of trial: 'Prepare thy soul for temptation.'

It would be foolish to make light of temptation, and still more foolish to neglect the temptations which actually arise or meet you. If there has been any fall in your past lives, do you not trace it in the first instance to a temptation? You have therefore to gird yourselves for the combat and to be ever on the watch, lest temptation surprise you and cause your downfall. But God will measure out both the

fierceness and duration of the assault and the grace which you will need to resist it and come off victorious. This doctrine is conveyed in St. Paul's words: 'He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall. Let no temptation take hold on you but such as is human. And God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it' (1 Cor. x. 12, 13). Be convinced, then, on the one hand, that you will surely experience temptations, and, on the other hand, that if you employ the proper precautions, weapons, and means, you will come off scatheless and victorious, and that the contest will strengthen you in virtue and be fruitful in merit and reward. It is true that the tempter succeeded with Eve, and through Eve with the first Adam; but when he was permitted to approach our Lord, the 'Second Adam,' he was overthrown and repulsed. Satan's success with the first Adam should convince you of the danger of temptation, while the victory over him of the 'Second Adam' should fill you with courage and confidence; for our Lord would have all His followers as well as Himself triumph over their arch-enemy, that their victory may also be His, as it will be achieved by His grace.

Our Lord has said: 'Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation' (St. Matt. xxvi. 41); and St. Paul warns the man who is overconfident to 'take heed lest he fall'; so evidently there is present in every temptation a danger which you cannot afford to despise. The danger may be hidden, or the

tempter may divert your gaze from it or minimize it in your mind; but it is ever there, in temptations both great and small. Our Lord, by introducing into the prayer which He has taught us the petition, 'Lead us not into temptation,' would seem to signify to us that the danger of temptation is ever at hand, and that it should be guarded against by daily prayer. It is not difficult for you to realize the constant presence of danger when you consider the sources of temptation; that temptations arise from the wiles and machinations of the devil, from the evil proclivities of fallen nature (human passions), and from the various allurements afforded by the visible world around you (its attractions of esteem, admiration, honour, wealth, and pleasure). All these are capable of bringing to bear upon you influences which, if yielded to, will make you unfaithful to your duty to God, and which will in various ways prove detrimental to your salvation. 'The creatures of God,' says the Book of Wisdom, 'are turned to an abomination, and a temptation to the souls of men, and a snare to the feet of the unwise' (xiv. 11).

Let us come now to consider some of the temptations to which men are exposed. If I pass in review before you some faults and weaknesses to which religious are happily strangers, except in very rare and very sad cases, let the simple narration of them fill you with horror, and give intensity to your spirit of prayer when you beseech God to save you from such evils.

It is not necessary to distinguish the specific origin of the various kinds of temptations—that is, to point

out if they proceed from the devil, the world, or the flesh, for the devil may use the domestic enemy and the world as allies in his assaults on you. In the case of Judas, for instance, you might suppose that his own passion of avarice led him to sell his Lord; but the Gospel tells us that Satan, too, instigated him in his crime, that he 'entered into Judas' (St. Luke xxii. 3).

We will consider at some length the graver assaults; time will not allow me to do more than to mention other temptations by which religious are led into various imperfections. The Spirit of Evil, to whom we attribute every kind of temptation, will in his graver assaults rise up against you as a serpent with seven heads, striving by his bite to infuse into your souls the poison of one or other of the seven deadly sins. He beholds in a religious the consecrated spouse of Christ, sworn to love her Lord with her whole heart, and to dedicate her entire life to His service. To overcome her, to make her unfaithful to her vows and to her service, would be to wound the tenderness of the Sacred Heart. He beholds in a religious a champion for God's rights, who seeks by prayer and edification to promote the spread of virtue and of all that is good. To make her fall away would be to weaken God's cause and to give further scope for his own evil machinations. He beholds in a religious an active agent of charity, whose works are blessed with fruitfulness in the Church, saving the young, imparting knowledge, assuaging sorrow, or aiding conversion. To draw her away from her vocation or to impair her useful-

ness would be to lessen the agencies which are so effectively militating against his own success in spreading spiritual devastation and ruin. It should not be difficult to you to conceive many motives to induce the Spirit of Evil to endeavour to overcome you by temptation, and it should not therefore surprise you that he multiplies his methods with a view to success in his efforts.

Consider, in the first place, that Satan tempts you to pride, which is the first of the seven deadly sins. How few persons are willing to admit that they have fallen victims to this vice! It insinuates itself into the conduct of a religious so subtly, that often she does not perceive it. How seldom she realizes that a temptation to pride is besetting her! How little she is on her guard against such a temptation; yet the Holy Scriptures affirm that 'pride is the beginning of all sin' (Ecclus. x. 15). Is she not, indeed, aware that she has frequently by pride offended God and lessened her supernatural merit? Yet perhaps for a time she justified her conduct to herself, although she afterwards became aware that it was vitiated by pride. These sins of a religious, when she is carried away by this insidious vice, may not be mortal; but yet Satan seeks by them to weaken her spirituality, to vitiate her motives, to rob her of merit, to lessen the edification she gives, and to lead her into other faults. Pride is therefore an absolute evil in itself, and it is also fruitful in evil in its consequences. How humiliating it should be for a religious to consider the causes of her falls into this sin of pride! She perhaps prides herself on her

good conduct, on her intellectual gifts, on her cleverness or various accomplishments, on her stature or figure, on her parentage, education or country, on success which she has done but little to achieve, on superiority over others which is merely accidental, or on the esteem in which she may be held. Alas! what a weakness it manifests when a religious allows herself to be carried away by pride on account of these matters! If she really does excel, how much is owing to her own action or endeavour? If her neighbour is less favoured that she is, does it become her to glorify herself because she is more favoured? Be on your guard against the rising of pride in your heart, against proud thoughts in your mind, against assuming an air of superiority in your manner, and against the glance of disdain from your eyes. 'Why,' says Ecclesiasticus, 'is earth and ashes proud?' (x. 9). 'Pride is hateful before God and men' (x. 7). Be very watchful, then, lest this vice, which is so common a failing, gain any fast hold of you to render you displeasing to God; for, as St. James quotes: 'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble' (iv. 6).

Let us now consider the second temptation of Satan. He tempts you to covetousness and avarice—in other words, to an inordinate desire of possessing this world's goods, the riches and comforts of life. This desire, as you know, is contrary to the spirit of poverty; and the spirit of poverty is the stanch bulwark of your vow. Perhaps you thought that you had crushed this desire when you pronounced your vow of poverty; but has not temptation proved that

the roots of the desire have not been entirely removed? Have you not been tempted to wish, contrary to the spirit of religious poverty, that you might have more of those various things which tend to comfort and convenience than are allowed by your rule, or by the regulations existing in your convent? In certain matters have you not felt desirous of more ample provision, as, perhaps, in the matter of diet, objects with which to recreate yourselves, money for your own use, or various articles which you might give to others? Or have you been tempted to envy the lot of the wealthy, or to regret having left the comforts of your former home? When such temptations came upon you, were you aware that the spirit of covetousness was still, in some measure, in your heart? Did you entertain those desires, or did you humble yourselves interiorly and pray to be protected against them? Do not make light of these assaults of Satan; his motive in leading you to covetousness of any kind is to lessen your love of holy poverty, and your zeal in practising it, with the view of thus gradually undermining the very foundation of your religious life; of making you worldly, immortified and self-seeking; of creating differences and distinctions in your communities; and of leading you further away from religious piety, self-denial and observance, while drawing you nearer to the love and worship of what we may regard as Mammon. Oh, love holy poverty, and beware of all temptations which would wound or weaken the spirit of poverty. Ask yourselves if you can expect to meet with continued fervour and piety in a religious who does not love

poverty, in one—if I may suppose such a case—who is too particular about her diet and the furnishing of her cell, who uses money extravagantly, and who puts her community to unnecessary expense. The condition of such an absence of practical poverty, and a condition of fervour and piety, are all but incompatible. Watch, then, over your desires, and repel strenuously all temptations which savour of covetousness.

The third venomous bite of the Serpent is that of lust. The humiliating temptations which come under this head have to be borne by a religious in the patience and silence of her own soul. Her prayer and her interior sighs are like those of David when he said: 'My heart is troubled within me. . . . Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?' (Ps. liv. 5, 7). Let the falls of others under temptation be a warning to you. Yes, others have fallen. A religious should be prudent, so as not to create danger for herself; she should watch jealously over those affections of hers which she has consecrated to her Divine Lord; and she should ever combat at the outset the evil thoughts and imaginations which Satan will insinuate into her mind.* St. Paul says: 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to another' (Gal. v. 17). This warfare is continual; it is a condition of your present existence for which you should make provision. 'Prepare thy soul for temptation.' How debasing is the vice

* When this conference is read publicly, the remainder of this paragragh might be omitted.

which is opposed to the superexcellent virtue of purity! It disturbs the imagination, weakens and corrupts the will, and vitiates the affections. Alas that any should allow it into their hearts! Even religious are not spared the continual contest, to keep it far from them. If you saw coming towards you a filthy animal that had been wallowing in the mire, what would you do? You would drive it away and keep it at a distance. In this way should you deal with evil thoughts and imaginations, and let your action be prompt. In the warfare of 'the spirit against the flesh,' there is the peculiar danger of treachery; the Christian is not encased in impenetrable armour, nor is the garrison in the citadel to be depended upon; his help must come from on high. If the temptation is humiliating, the victory over it is glorious; but to be indiscreet or dilatory is to play with fire—you will at last be caught by the flames. Indiscretion in this matter must not be countenanced, because it is as the outer circle of the vortex; it leads to becoming further involved. Satan's first, and perhaps only, assaults upon religious are directed against their minds and affections; oh, guard these well. Beware also of curiosity, of personal vanity, and of immortification.

The fourth poisonous bite of the Serpent is that of anger. Religious should, of all Christians, excel in meekness. They make profession of being followers of our Lord, even to the practice of the evangelical counsels: will they not study the lesson which He gives when He says: 'Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart'? Religious should

practise self-control, and be models of meekness. In anger the irascible appetite or proclivity gains the mastery over reason; you lose self-possession, and you are then carried away to say and do things which in your calmer moments you will regret. You are liable from time to time to suffer temptations to anger; they come from the viciousness of fallen nature or from the Spirit of Evil. Be assured it is not the Holy Spirit of God that inspires or actuates you when you are violently moved by a small circumstance or trifling misadventure, when you conceive cause for anger where none actually exists, or when every little annoyance disturbs your serenity and makes you impatient and irascible. Beware, then, of this temptation which leads to conduct so opposed to religion and right reason. Anger, as a cloud, obscures the soul; then follow false notions and appreciations, hasty and ill-judged action—God is offended and peace of mind is lost. Persons of uncontrolled angry temperament will cause annoyance and injury to others, and will often give rise to contentions and misunderstandings. 'A passionate man,' says Solomon, 'provoketh quarrels; and he that is easily stirred up to wrath shall be more prone to sin' (Prov. xxix. 22). Restraint should be particularly exercised by a religious when she is not under the observation of her superiors or elders, for it sometimes happens that a religious, when not protected by the restraint imposed by the presence of her elders, gives the bridle to her passion, to the disedification of the young. Resistance to temptations to anger should be strenuous and persevering; it is

often heroic, but always meritorious. Anger is particularly unseemly in a religious. Strive, then, to acquire the virtue of meekness, which will make you pleasing to God and edifying to your neighbour, and which will, according to our Lord's promise, bring you into the possession of the land, the heavenly inheritance.

The fifth poisonous bite of the wily Serpent is that of gluttony. By this vice he leads men to a lower depth of degradation. Religious are seldom, if ever, exposed to temptations to this vice; but danger would arise if they too easily framed unjustifiable excuses for taking wines, or other intoxicating drinks, on the plea of ill-health or trying work, or if they yielded to pressure brought to bear upon them by overkind friends. Indulgence, on any plea, has often the result of engendering a weakness or liking which may lead to a habit or propensity fatal to the virtue of temperance.

How sad is the case of persons given to the vice of intemperance! They seem powerless against temptation, and steeled against shame; strangers to self-respect, and unconcerned by the pain which they cause or by the scandal which they give. If only as an atonement for the sins of Christians guilty of this vice, resolve to be abstemious at your meals, and to refrain from taking unnecessary refection apart from the usual meals.

The sixth poisonous bite of the Serpent is that of envy. Here is certainly a most miserable and ignoble temptation, and one from which those who fall victims to it seem to derive absolutely no gain or satisfaction.

Examine the workings and consequences of envy. If your neighbour—and this neighbour would, in your case, be most likely a sister religious—excelled you in nobility of character, in reputation for superior virtue, in intellectual gifts, in accomplishments, in more successful work, in the esteem of others, or in zeal, instead of rejoicing on that account, and of giving her her due, you would, if actuated by this vice of envy, underrate her merits, seek to lessen her in the appreciation of others, point out her shortcomings, and even strive to cause her some humiliation; you would very probably begin to dislike her, feel annoyed by the mention of her name, and be still more annoyed by the recounting of her praises; and you might also proceed to create a conspiracy against her. Such conduct on your part would be very unworthy and despicable. See, then, how evil a thing envy is! It dispels the sweet fragrance of charity, and tears asunder its beautiful blossom. Can you not build up a house for yourself except your neighbour's be first laid in ruins? Is there only one form of excellence in the world, and that one your own? Has not God bestowed gifts upon your neighbour as well as upon you, and have not all His gifts to be turned to good account? These are questions which an envious person would do well to weigh and answer. Oh, beware of this vice which gnaws, and blights, and consumes nobility of character and sentiment! Repel from you the tempter when he endeavours to introduce the poison of it into your hearts.

The seventh and last bite of the Serpent is one which produces a soporific effect—namely, the bite of

sloth. Sloth is of two kinds—corporal and spiritual; but they are often found closely allied. If a religious yields to the temptation of corporal sloth, spiritual sloth will almost inevitably accompany it. This vice seems to be of the passive order, and therefore not so alarming; but its consequences are disastrous, both to those who give way to it and to those who depend upon their labours. Sloth is the vice of the man who hides his master's money instead of turning it to proper account. The time of a religious, her faculties and abilities, and her vocation, may be termed the talent committed to her; what will God say to her if through sloth she allows her talent to lie idle? Oh, ask yourselves if it is in these days, when energy, activity, and zeal are so much needed to cope with the evils of the age, ever increasing in number and influence, that religious capable of doing so much good should give themselves up to a slothful life, or to a sluggish manner of acting. Shall the propagandists of error, and the ministers and promoters of evil, display greater energy in a bad cause than the servants of God do in the cause of God, of truth, religion, and virtue? Ah, no! you will gird yourselves to all the work demanded of you by your institute and by the Church, that none may remain ignorant whom you are called upon to instruct, that none may remain in neglect and in want if your charity is called upon to minister to them, and that none may perish if through the agency of your zeal a hand can be stretched out to save them. Your sloth and inactivity may prove to be Satan's opportunity; beware, then, of sloth of body, of mind, or of the

spirit, in piety or in labour, lest you become unprofitable servants.

These seven forms of temptation are formidable; countless souls have been seduced by them. Be prepared for the assaults of some of them: 'Stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation.' There are also lesser faults into which the tempter will endeavour to draw you, such as human respect, dissipation, discouragement, and love of ease. Combat human respect by purity of intention, combat dissipation by recollectedness and love of duty, combat discouragement by prayer and confidence in God, and combat love of ease by acts of self-denial.

It pleases God to test the earnestness of your service and of your love by the various temptations which He sends or permits. Keep your souls in patience under this form of trial, and resist the temptations for His sake, to please Him, and to testify to your love of Him. Such conduct will win you His aid and His blessing.

Conscious of your own weakness, you readily acknowledge that you cannot of yourselves resist strong temptations, and overthrow so wily and so powerful a tempter as the Spirit of Darkness. Oh, how important, then, it is to avoid exposing yourselves unnecessarily to danger, and how necessary in time of temptation to have speedy recourse to God! 'Let us,' St. Paul says, 'put on the armour of God' (Eph. vi. 11). Raise your hearts to God in brief but fervent prayer; supplicate the Mother of God, your Guardian Angel, and your holy Patrons,

to aid you by their intercession. Let your provision against assault be your devotion at Holy Mass and in receiving Holy Communion, and your devotedness to the religious life; thus will you be made strong, be kept fervent, and merit God's special protection.

In God's name, remembering always your grace and your privileged calling, struggle ever with energy and constancy against every temptation, and strive to walk ever in the paths of religious virtue. You will not be spared the warfare and the worry of temptations. Be especially on your guard against what you believe to be your predominant weakness or passion. Let your hope and trust in God be firm. He may try you, but He will also support you, and in His own good time He will reward you, according to the words of St. James: 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him' (i. 12).

## IX.

### *HUMILITY.*

'Take up My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart.'—ST. MATT. xi. 29.

YOU would do well during your retreat to examine yourselves upon your progress in humility. You know well that our Lord loved this fundamental virtue, and that both by word and example He enjoined its practice upon His followers. You could not be said to be His disciples if you disregarded the lessons in this virtue which He has given you, and which He particularly points to when He says: 'Learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart.' He tells you that you are to take His yoke upon you by becoming, in imitation of Him, meek and humble.

Perhaps there are comparatively few of His followers who ever examine themselves, and say to themselves, 'Am I humble?' They may recognise the sinfulness and unbecomingness of pride, but may yet fail to appreciate the necessity and excellence of humility; they may not wish to exalt themselves, but at the same time they have no desire to humble themselves; they may not love distinc-

tion, but they guard themselves carefully against every kind of humiliation. You will say that this is only natural. Yes; but we have for our Instructor and Model in virtue the Creator of human nature —our Lord, by whom 'all things were made' (St. John i. 3), who is also 'the true Light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world' (St. John i. 9); and because we must walk in the light of His teaching and example, and accomplish the works of grace in preference to those of nature, we must, under our Lord's instruction and guidance, love and practise the virtue of humility, although it may be trying to nature to do so. It is very important that we should be fully persuaded that our highest and most glorious privilege is to be the children of grace, to be called therefore to supernaturalize life by the means and help of grace, and to be able to look forward to the supernatural reward, which can be merited only by works in the supernatural order. If we serve only nature, we must look to nature for our reward; but if we look for the heavenly supernatural reward, we must attain to it by works above those which are simply in the order of nature, by works performed in the order of grace. When we take up the yoke of Christ, and practise humility according to His injunction, what we do under these conditions is done in the order of grace, and will merit for us supernatural reward; as our Lord has said, 'You shall find rest to your souls.'

When once the Master has spoken, the disciple has only to obey. Our Lord, in most distinct terms,

bids His followers to be humble. Let us study what He requires of us. We will consider principally in this conference what humility is, why it is necessary to us, and how we should practise it.

Humility, if we would define in what it principally consists, may be described as that virtue which leads us to entertain a lowly opinion of ourselves, to abstain from seeking glory from others, to take willingly for God's sake a place of inferiority, to give honour and place to others, and to refer all things in a spirit of justice, reverence, and love to the glory of God.

The character of perfect justice which regulates this eminent virtue of humility makes us render to God praise for any excellence or good of any kind which we perceive in ourselves or others. Even if at times we observe in ourselves good qualities which we do not—either at all, or not as notably—perceive in others, we do not therefore exalt ourselves above others, because we refer the glory to God, and because we are persuaded that others may, at the same time, surpass us in various respects which are not, perhaps, manifest to us; and that every excellence, whether in ourselves or in others, whether hidden or manifest, is God's gift, and that the glory of it should justly and dutifully be attributed to God.

If only we would reflect upon God's infinite excellence and our own nothingness, we would join with St. Paul in declaring our full conviction that we are not sufficient 'to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves,' for, as St. Paul goes on to say, 'our sufficiency is from God' (2 Cor. iii. 5). In another

place this Apostle warns us against self-deception as to any importance which we might attribute to ourselves. 'If any man,' he says, 'think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself' (Gal. vi. 3). Elsewhere, too, he points out our complete dependence upon God for the grace necessary for our salvation. 'For by grace,' he says, 'you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God' (Eph. ii. 8). Reflections such as these upon our relations with God should prepare us to practise the virtue of humility. We depend upon God for every blessing, whether in the order of nature or of grace, and we should acknowledge that, being in our fallen condition sinners and children of wrath, we are of ourselves altogether unworthy to receive any blessing; nor should we receive any if it were not for the merits of our Divine Redeemer (Rom. viii. 32; St. John xv. 4). We admire, in the case of Abraham, the sense of lowliness which he gave expression to, when in his pleading for Sodom he said: 'I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes' (Gen. xviii. 27). Shall we think more of ourselves than did Abraham of himself? 'Why,' asks Ecclesiasticus, 'is earth and ashes proud?' (x. 9). What we are in God's eyes, in the light of truth, that only are we. We have, with Solomon, to acknowledge ourselves servants of God, weak, short-lived, and wanting in understanding (Wisd. ix. 5); and we should therefore be convinced that it would not become us to be other than humble.

We have to aim at humility in mind and heart, in

words, and in our general conduct. We are humble in mind if, without prejudice to truth, we are convinced of our many deficiencies, and own to ourselves that without God's help and protection we should be at the mercy of base passions and evil inclinations, which would render us despicable in the eyes of God and of our fellow beings, as well as in our own eyes. Humility does not require that, with prejudice to what we know to be true, we should pretend to ourselves that we have not qualities and accomplishments which we really possess; but it requires that we should not seek glory for ourselves on account of them, or make them an occasion of boasting. Humility of mind causes us to remember that if we have good points in our character, if we have some talent, or if we have done some good or achieved some success, we have yet our weaknesses and imperfections, and we have committed many faults, and failed in many ways. We may foster this virtue by often making interior acts of humility; by acknowledging the greatness and holiness of God, and our own lowliness and sinfulness; and by placing ourselves in spirit beneath others, holding ourselves undeserving of notice or esteem.

Humility of heart supposes some affection for humiliations which we are prepared to endure for the love of God and for our own spiritual profit. A man is also humble of heart if he is willing to embrace what will humble him, even when it comes as a result of his fault or in punishment of it. Humility of heart also supposes a hatred of what is contrary to humility. A man who is humble of

heart is therefore opposed to vainglory and vanity, which are the offspring of pride. The Scribes and Pharisees were strangers to this humility of heart, because, instead of loving to be unknown and unnoticed, they put themselves forward upon every occasion, through a love of notice and honour. Our Lord pointed this out when He said: 'They love the first places at feasts, and the first chairs in the synagogues, and salutations in the market-place' (St. Matt. xxiii. 6, 7). A man is humble of heart if he loves the virtue of humility, and purposes to himself to acquire it and to practise it: and if he therefore prays to obtain it, strives to act composedly when he receives slights, and even seeks occasions of humbling himself. Our Lord's injunction to us is to learn of Him to be humble of heart. Virtue does not spring so much from the mind—that is, from our understanding—as from the heart—that is, from our affection and will. It is therefore most important that we should strive to appreciate the necessity and excellence of humility. Humility may be regarded as a distinctive mark of holiness, and the groundwork upon which the other virtues are erected. The various considerations which comprise this conference present to us as many reasons for appreciating this virtue.

By humility in our words, we understand speaking, when we must do so, of our works without boasting, or exaggeration of our merit—speaking of them truthfully and modestly. Our Lord teaches us not to mention our good works without some occasion or necessity where He says: 'When thou dost alms, let

not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth' (St. Matt. vi. 3). Elsewhere He says: 'When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which we ought to do' (St. Luke xvii. 10). Sometimes persons speak in a depreciatory manner of their good works in order to elicit praise both of their works and of their pretended humility, but this is a form of pride.

Humility, finally, must manifest itself in our conduct. We must avoid arrogance in look, tone of voice, or behaviour, and be careful not to put ourselves forward so as to monopolize attention; we must avoid a vain display in dress and in our general surroundings; and, while careful to show respect and deference to others, we must not be exacting in the respect to which we ourselves are entitled. St. Paul's advice to the Romans is thus worded: 'Being of one mind one towards another, not minding high things, but consenting to the humble; be not wise in your own conceits' (Rom. xii. 16). A man humble in his conduct will not assume an air of superiority, but will act with becoming simplicity and modesty. Our Lord, in one of His instructions addressed 'to the multitudes and to His disciples,' said: 'He that is the greatest among you shall be your servant' (St. Matt. xxiii. 11).

You will find in ascetical writings, and in the Lives of the Saints, useful lessons as to how to practise humility. St. Teresa, for instance, teaches you how to seek occasions of fulfilling humble offices, and of practising mortifying penances. She recommended

her religious to exercise themselves in humility by refraining from offering excuses when in fault, by not murmuring in times of abjection, by not even (as a rule) justifying themselves when wrongfully blamed, and by shunning carefully every pre-eminence or honourable distinction.

Let us now pass from our considerations of what sincere humility demands, which we have studied only in a general outline, and not in detail or at any length, and let us go on to consider especially three reasons why we should practise humility. We should love this virtue, and give ourselves to its practice, because our Lord demands it in His followers, because it is a necessary means of sanctification, and because of its relation to our heavenly glory.

It would be strange if, being followers of our Lord, we did not study, and make much of, His teaching and example. We worship Him as the Divine Model and Teacher of men; we are powerfully drawn to Him in both these characters by unceasing admiration and love, and our truest happiness comes of studying His life and works, and of hanging upon His words. We have long ago been convinced that our Lord was perfect in His humility, and that He wishes His followers to be humble. 'He that will be first among you,' He said, 'shall be your servant; even as the Son of Man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a redemption for many' (St. Matt. xx. 27, 28). We recognise the first evidence of His humility in His assumption of human nature. Describing this mystery, St. Paul says that He 'emptied Himself, taking the form of a

servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man; He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross' (Phil. ii. 7, 8). He took the form of a servant, and throughout His life He humbled Himself not only under the will of His heavenly Father, but even under that of His own creatures. Moreover, He appeared in His atonement loaded with the sins of the whole world; His infinite sanctity seemed for the time hidden under the load of man's wickedness, for which He graciously undertook to offer adequate satisfaction. By a most surprising condescension, He became the champion of our race against the spirits of evil. This mystery is further described by St. Paul where he says: 'And you, when you were dead in your sins . . . He hath quickened together with Him, forgiving you all offences: blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us . . . fastening it to the cross: and despoiling the principalities and powers . . . triumphing over them in Himself' (Col. ii. 13-15). How many humiliations and acts of humility we meet with in our Lord's life from Bethlehem to Calvary! What humility we behold in Him in His birth in a stable, in His fleeing into exile, in His toils at Nazareth, in His baptism by John, in His washing His disciples' feet, and in all the ignominy of His sacred Passion! His final act of humility was His submission to death. Lastly, we seem to see in the mystery of His love, in the wonders of the Holy Eucharist, a perpetuation of His humiliations, since it is ever to us the tenderest continual display of His condescensions.

Let us now make a brief study of the lessons conveyed by our Lord's words. His doctrine must be received by humble minds. The proud receive it scornfully or reservedly; they criticise its terms, and minimize or disregard its import, and it therefore produces little or no fruit in their hearts and lives. Our Lord said: 'Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones' (St. Luke x. 21). And again: 'Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit' (St. John xii. 24, 25). We must, in humility of mind and heart, imitate little children if we would profit of the means of salvation, and reach the heavenly kingdom. Such is the lesson our Lord gave when He said: 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Amen I say to you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter into it' (St. Mark x. 14, 15). Furthermore, we must carry our humility into our exterior behaviour; we should, when we can, rather flee from honours than seek them, and we should not, through vanity or conceit, prefer ourselves to others. Such are the lessons conveyed in the following words uttered by our Lord upon different occasions: 'When thou art invited, go, sit down in the lowest place' (St. Luke xiv. 10); 'Whosoever will be the greater among you, let him be your minister; and he that will be first among you, shall be your servant' (St. Matt. xx. 26, 27): 'You also ought to wash one another's feet: for I have given

you an example, that as I have done, so you do also' (St. John xiii. 14, 15).

We have, in the next place, to consider the necessity of humility as a means of sanctification. St. Peter teaches us that we must humble ourselves if we would find favour with God, by whose grace only we can be sanctified, where he says: 'Do you all insinuate humility one to another, for God resisteth the proud, but to the humble He giveth grace' (1 St. Pet. v. 5). When pride showed itself in the heavens, how speedily God cast it forth! 'I saw Satan,' our Lord tells us, 'like lightning falling from heaven' (St. Luke x. 18). St. Bernard says that humility is as a good and stable foundation of the other virtues, and that if this foundation give way, then will the whole accumulation of virtues be nothing but a ruin.* We do not look for virtues in a proud man, but in the man who is humble. God listens to the prayers of the humble, and watches over them with a special providence, and it cannot but follow that they will thus merit His grace. He says by His prophet: 'To whom shall I have respect, but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My words?' (Isa. lxvi. 2). Far from having this regard for the proud, God, on the contrary, rejects them: 'He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart' (St. Luke i. 51). The humble, aided by grace, further the work of their sanctification by recognising their faults and striving to amend them,

* 'Virtutum bonum quoddam ac stabile fundamentum humilitas, nempe si nutet illa, virtutum aggregatio non nisi ruina est' ('De Consid.').

by receiving correction, by praying constantly for the graces which they need, by avoiding the occasions of their falls, and by a salutary mistrust of themselves. They also frequent the Holy Sacraments with eagerness, regarding them as Divinely instituted helps to their amendment and sanctification, and they practise various devotions in order to obtain greater spiritual benefit.

Let us, in the third place, make a few reflections upon the relation which humility has to our heavenly reward. Even for great works in this world God has ever used humble instruments. We see this in His choice of Moses, Saul, David, and Judith. Remember how Samuel said to Saul: 'When thou wast a little one in thy own eyes, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel?' (1 Kings xv. 17). We see it also in the case of the Apostles. 'The foolish things of this world,' St. Paul says, 'hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things . . . that He may confound the strong' (1 Cor. i. 27). Humility is a help to the attainment of heavenly glory, because it banishes from the heart pride and every other vice; because, the mind and heart not being vainly elated, it preserves them from disturbance, and disposes them for spiritual gifts; and because God loves and enriches those who, like the humble, do not rob Him of the glory which belongs to Him, but who refer to Him as its Author every good. Our Lord said: 'Everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted' (St. Luke xviii. 14). We are also told how, upon an occasion,

He called to Him a little child, and set him in the midst of the disciples, saying: 'Amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven' (St. Matt. xviii. 3). We may conclude, therefore, that if we humble ourselves, and become as little children, we shall tread the path which most surely leads to the heavenly reward. The saints strove to follow that path, and behold how they are now exalted!

We have thus far, by various considerations, impressed upon our minds some idea of what is understood by humility, and we have reflected upon some of the reasons which should induce us to practise this virtue. Let us now, in conclusion, propose to ourselves several ways in which we will endeavour to practise it.

Let us, in the first place, be resolved in all our works and in our whole life to give all the glory to God. We are in the danger, through our natural pride, of taking to ourselves glory on account of any science, accomplishment, virtue, or other excellence which we may see in ourselves. This glory belongs by right to God, through whose gift, help, or grace we have acquired such excellence. We may compare ourselves to the canvas of a painting. However much the work of art displayed upon the canvas may be extolled, but little, if any, thought is given to the canvas. All the praise is bestowed upon the artist, who would very naturally feel hurt if the merit of the work were attributed to the canvas. God, too, would be offended if we were to take to ourselves any of the glory which belongs to Him as the Author of

all the good that is in us. 'What,' asks St. Paul, 'hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?' (1 Cor. iv. 7). Let us then own, in a spirit of humility, our dependence upon God for every help and blessing, and refer to Him the praise and glory of every good which we are His instruments in accomplishing.

Let us, in the second place, strive to overcome human respect; let us be determined to be faithful to what duty and virtue demand of us, without taking unduly into account what men may say of us. At times pride hinders the good we should do, or spoils the good we do, on account of our fear of criticism, or because we are actuated by the desire of standing well with our neighbour, or of avoiding his displeasure. If we were truly humble, we would act with greater simplicity and disinterestedness, and would seek rather to please God than to preserve or gain the esteem of man.

Let us, in the third place, be resolved when we meet with afflictions or opposition or humiliations, to regard ourselves as deserving of greater suffering and disregard than such as befall us. We would do well in these trying circumstances to call to mind our many sins in the past, and our present infidelities, and to say to ourselves that according to our true deserts we should be despised by all men, and be more severely punished by God.

Let us, in the fourth place, endeavour to bestow upon our neighbour a more just measure of consideration, praise and respect than we have been

accustomed to bestow in the past. To despise or treat with disdain our neighbour, or to refuse him his due measure of esteem, is, as a rule, the result of pride; let us therefore be on our guard against this kind of pride, which bears also the odium of injustice. Let us be willing, for God's sake, to place our neighbour before ourselves; and let us carefully avoid making all unnecessary comparisons which would wound our neighbour's susceptibilities. 'In humility,' says St. Paul, 'let each esteem others better than themselves' (Phil. ii. 3).

Let us, lastly, be determined to keep a watch over our speech, to avoid speaking unnecessarily of any good which we may have been the means of doing, and not to seek to bring round conversation to a point at which others may be led to praise us. The subtilty of pride exercises itself perhaps mostly in conversation. How ashamed we should be of the many weaknesses in this respect to which in the past our pride has betrayed us!

Let not our Lord speak in vain to us when He says: 'Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart.' We will reflect earnestly upon the meaning of this Divine injunction; and we will examine our conduct to see what we have to amend, and what we have not yet begun to practise, that we may become more truly His disciples. By humility we shall escape the pitfalls which lie in the way of the proud, we shall tread the path of security and peace, we shall lay the foundation of solid virtue, we shall dispose our souls for many graces, and, to our inexpressible joy, we shall become dear to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

## X.

### *CONVERSION.*

'I will bring them back again, because I will have mercy on them.'—ZACH. x. 6.

OF the three conversions which should result from the retreat—conversion to the light, to amendment, and to a more perfect way—we will devote in this conference special thought to the second, the conversion which comprises repentance and amendment, which signifies the correction of all that needs correction. It may be said that the object which a religious has particularly in view in making the annual retreat is self-examination with a view to amendment. It must not be supposed that there is no conversion except from the state of mortal sin: there may be a daily conversion from some kind of faultiness; but, strange as it may seem, such daily conversion is neither proposed nor attempted by the lukewarm and disedifying, but only by souls full of zeal for their sanctification. Thus it comes that the lukewarm and disedifying make no amendment, while the fervent are ever becoming more pleasing to God.

Amendment is not man's work alone: it would not be effected unless the grace came from God. It is therefore God's work, but man must not resist the grace which moves him to repentance and amendment; he must welcome it and comply with its movements. God says to sinners and to all who need conversion, and to whom He vouchsafes the grace of conversion: 'I will bring them back again, because I will have mercy on them.' What does this mean if not the opening of the arms of the Father of all mercies to receive back the erring child? The infinite Creator, who has been neglected or sinned against, stoops to the weak and ungrateful creature to raise it from its fall, to restore it to favour, and to enrich it with supernatural blessings. Can you conceive any creature, any Christian, any religious, turning away and refusing so great a grace? Come, then, to consider the subject of conversion, with a mind determined to discover if you have reason to amend anything in your mode of life, or in the spirit of your service of God, and to discover if God is offering to you this grace of amendment, that you may take comfort from this proof of His love, and employ steps to correspond with it.

There will be no conversion unless you have a sense of the need of it. It is deplorable to witness the indifference of some religious whose whole conduct gives evidence of the need of amendment, but who seem themselves unconscious of the fact that they are giving disedification. While this seeming unconsciousness continues, no move will be made. How deplorable to be at peace when there is so much

reason for alarm! Their condition, however, is not so deplorable as that of religious who are fully conscious of their unsatisfactory condition, but who do not wish to be converted; either they have counted the cost and decline to undertake it, or they defer, till some indefinite future time, taking the necessary steps. Such a condition is the result of hardness of heart; continuing in it will only make the heart harder, and final conversion more doubtful.

Perhaps you already have a sense of your need of conversion; if not, it may follow your self-examination at some stage of the retreat. It often happens that a religious is conscious of a kind of general unsatisfactoriness. This may proceed from a marked falling away in fervour and devotedness to her vocation, or from some particular faults. Nothing will so surely lead to such a feeling as persevering in the commission of some sin, or what is termed having affection for a particular sin. A religious who has this so-called affection seems to say to Almighty God: 'I am willing to serve You in every other way, I am willing to do everything else, but don't ask me to give up this failing.' Can she expect that God will allow this exception, that He will permit that idol to have its place in a heart which He claims as His own? He resents such conduct by denying to the religious those special helps and consolations which support the fervent, and the religious experiences the loss to her cost. This sense of unsatisfactoriness may result from being careless in dealing with temptations, from unfaithfulness to duty, or from living and acting almost

without purpose or effort; it may result also from receiving the holy sacraments more through routine than from actual devotion.

It is not necessary to stay to try to convince you that when there are known failings, particularly if they give disedification, there is need of conversion. If any religious is conscious that she is constantly disobedient, that she does not respect her superior's authority, that she gives way to dislike, and shows it, that she is guilty of self-indulgence, that she does not restrain her angry feelings, that there is duplicity or hypocrisy in her conduct, that she is disedifying and unobservant, that she exercises an influence over others which she uses to lead them from dutifulness, that she neglects her duties to the prejudice of her institute or of those committed to her care, or that there is any other fault by which she offends God; she cannot but be aware of the necessity of repenting of it, and of striving earnestly to correct it. There is, therefore, incumbent upon her the duty of conversion, and she should pray for the grace to comply promptly and fully with this duty.

The way of conversion in some cases must necessarily be rough and painful; you must knock loudly or shake roughly to awaken the heavy slumberer. So God at times, to move the unrepentant and the half-repentant, sends chastisements; but His doing so is a merciful dispensation, for the Holy Ghost assures us that 'whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth' (Prov. iii. 12). Sometimes men who have fallen into sin, or who are subject to a dangerous failing—particularly if a notable vice—

neglect to do adequate penance, or to employ the means necessary for their correction and amendment; they spare the knife, they do not apply the remedy. God then, as it were, takes up the matter; He permits a fall, which is attended with disgrace and confusion, and which leads both to exposure and condign punishment. What view should be taken of this? The slumberer has been roughly shaken, but only to bring him to a consciousness of his danger that he may save himself from it. The happy results of what may be so painful to those men in the correction will more than counterbalance the confusion and the disgrace, if only these be borne with humility and patience. We see in God's action the display of His mercy: for He steps in to save them, He draws good out of what appears to be an evil, and the result is a victory over the vice or dangerous failing, although won at some cost. Those men should not close their eyes to the benefit so mercifully designed for them; they should be filled with gratitude, and correspond cordially and faithfully with God's designs. With David they should say: 'It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me, that I may learn Thy justifications' (Ps. cxviii. 71). We would not have humbled ourselves, we might have gone on in the evil way, but Thou hast sent us that humiliation and confusion. It was good for us. Even in religion slumberers have been found who needed arousing such as this. When God in His mercy metes out chastisement, a religious should know how to receive it and how to bear it. The counsel of the Holy Spirit is: 'Reject

not the correction of the Lord, and do not faint when thou art chastised by Him' (Prov. iii. 11).

Not all, however, have to own to persistency in unsatisfactory conduct or to affection for any particular failing. There happily are many religious who, though they may from time to time, through frailty, offend in some way, are yet dutiful and fervent. Let such as these, while they humble themselves because of their lowliness before the majesty and infinite holiness of God, sing in their hearts their hymns of gratitude and praise, ever beseeching God to sustain them, and to keep them from abusing or neglecting His grace.

As to religious who need conversion, we have seen, in the first place, that they should be impressed with a sense of this need. They should, in the next place, form the resolution of striving to effect it. They must imitate the prodigal son. The prodigal entered into himself, and recognised his miserable condition; but he did not let the matter rest there, he came to a resolution and purpose, saying: 'I will arise, and I will go to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee' (St. Luke xv. 18). A religious who recognises that she is called upon to correct some faultiness should say two things, 'I repent of it,' and 'I will amend.' We then have evidence that she is determined to cope effectually with her faultiness. Repentance without amendment is unreal, and there will be no amendment while there is no repentance.

Grace has knocked at the door of her heart and been admitted, when she says, in all earnestness, 'I

repent.' She realizes the evil of her conduct, how displeasing it has been to God—in other words, the malice of it—and the many disastrous consequences of her faultiness. A light is now thrown upon her faults which inspires her with detestation of them; this is a feeling which she should encourage, for when it is absent amendment is seldom permanent. David implied this detestation when he said: 'I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me' (Ps. l. 5), or, in other words, 'I know how enormous my crime was, and I cannot banish it from my mind.' When horror of the ways of sin has ceased, the sinner is likely to return to them. Influenced by the impression produced on her mind by this realization of her fault and this detestation of it, the religious says 'I repent.' Aided by grace, she conceives a hearty sorrow for all her offences; she wishes that her conduct had been different. She has reached the stage of conversion mentioned by the Gospel in the case of St. Peter, where it says: 'Going forth, he wept bitterly' (St. Matt. xxvi. 75). A healing sorrow fills her soul; it is that of which St. Paul says: 'The sorrow that is according to God worketh penance steadfast unto salvation' (2 Cor. vii. 10); it is the sorrow which humbles: 'A contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise' (Ps. l. 19); it is the sorrow which averts the punishment merited by sin. When King Roboam, and all Israel with him, had forsaken the law of God, God permitted the Egyptians under Sesac their King to overrun the land, and to march upon Jerusalem, saying to Israel by His prophet: 'You have left Me,

and I have left you in the hand of Sesac.' Then Roboam and the princes of Israel were in consternation, and they said: 'The Lord is just.' When, however, God saw that they humbled themselves, and threw themselves on His mercy, He mitigated their punishment, saying again by His prophet: 'Because they are humbled, I will not destroy them' (2 Par. xii. 7). Filled with this purifying sorrow, the religious prays for pardon. And now she enters on the last stage of repentance: she declares herself ready to embrace and perform salutary penance for her sins. She is prepared to say with the prodigal: 'Father, I am not worthy to be called Thy child, make me as one of Thy hired servants.' In proof of the sincerity of my repentance, I am willing to submit to any humiliation which Thou shalt require of me; but let Thy chastisement be in the display of Thy mercy towards me: 'O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy indignation, nor chastise me in Thy wrath' (Ps. vi. 2).

Weigh well these characteristics of a sincere repentance, and examine if they are to be found in yours when you turn to the mercy-seat of God to ask for pardon. But something is still wanting to complete the picture of conversion: there must be amendment at least in desire and purpose. This is the proof and complement of repentance. The religious who has corresponded with the grace of conversion, and said 'I repent,' must now say 'I will amend.' You would not believe in the repentance of a man given to intemperance if he still associated with drunkards, and frequented houses in

which he had been wont to fall into this sin. Nor should you believe in the repentance of a religious who had scandalized her sisters by neglect of duty, disobedience, or in other ways, if she continued the same conduct. A firm purpose of amendment is necessary in the Sacrament of Penance for its valid reception. Conversion, then, implies desire of amendment and effort to amend; and this desire and this effort are the test of the sincerity of it. How will they be manifested? In three ways. When a man sincerely repents of any kind of sin, he leaves and avoids what were to him the occasions of it; he is, moreover, careful to guard himself against any danger of falling into it again; and he strives to atone for his past falls by a virtuous and devout life. Here we see three tokens of amendment which offer a guarantee of its sincerity and of its endurance. Do we find them in the case of a lax religious when she comes out of retreat, or when grace has touched her heart at other times?

Does she, in the first place, avoid those breaches of rule which were the occasion of her faults? Is she careful not to associate others with herself in her disregard of observance, in her opposition to authority, in her dislike of particular sisters, or in her plans for upsetting arrangements which do not fall in with her views? Does she in other ways avoid persons or places which occasioned her remissness? The occasions of falls are like the stone placed over the tomb of Lazarus, and the winding bands which bound his feet and hands; these had to be removed when he was restored to life before he was free. So must a

religious remove the occasion of her faults if she would be freed from them. Is she careful, in the second place, to protect herself, by greater watchfulness, circumspection, and firmness of action, against relapse? Does she recognise her weakness, and therefore use the remedies and precautions which prudence would suggest to be employed in order to guard herself against danger? Does she therefore often renew her good resolutions and purposes of greater dutifulness? Finally, what atonement does she make for the past? Is she now more devout and more edifying in every way? Or is she a penitent that does no penance? If her fault was disobedience, she should now give special attention to the practice of obedience; if she failed against charity, she should now bridle her tongue and correct her manner, and show consideration for others. Whatever her weakness may have been, she should now, by way of atonement to God and compensation to her neighbour and to religion, manifest a spirit of devotedness to duty and piety. As God says by His prophet, it is not enough for conversion to turn from sin; there must be renewed fervour in the service of God. 'Cast away from you all your transgressions . . . and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit' (Ezech. xviii. 31).

We have traced that path of repentance and amendment which is the way of true conversion. There are, alas! many conversions which are not permanent; something is wanting in earnestness of purpose and fidelity to good resolutions, if not also in the sincerity of the sorrow. But when the path

which we have traced has been followed, how happy have been the results! Then was the heart prepared for the graces and consolations of the Holy Spirit. God said: 'I will pour waters upon the thirsty ground, and streams upon the dry land' (Isa. xliv. 3). What a change of feeling was the consequence! What a relief to have shaken off the fetters of the failings which kept the soul back from God, and to experience the fresh attraction towards piety and dutifulness, and the new impulse in the direction of a more perfect life! The change is something like that of the man possessed by a devil who had dwelt in sepulchres, and who constantly cut himself, and terrified others. His condition was both lamentable and desperate; but when our Lord had driven out the unclean spirit, the dispossessed man was found by the people at our Lord's feet, sitting there clothed and in his right mind (St. Luke viii. 35)—not now distracted and in misery, harming himself and threatening injury to others, but freed from the cruel tyranny to which he had been subjected, composed and in peace, and become the disciple of his Divine deliverer.

True conversion disarms the Divine wrath; it changes God's regard from one of anger to one of complacency. 'Let no one,' says St. Ambrose, 'be mistrustful, let no one conscious of former sins despair of attaining to the Divine rewards; God knows how to change His sentence upon you if you know how to amend your fault.'* A notable example

* 'Novit Dominus mutare sententiam, si tu noveris emendare delictum' (Lib. 2 in Luc., c. i.).

of this change of God's sentence is furnished by the prophet Jonas in the case of the city of Nineve. The prophet passed through the immense city announcing, 'Yet forty days and Nineve shall be destroyed.' Thereupon the King ordered a fast to be proclaimed, and public penance to be performed by all, saying: 'Let them turn every one from his evil way. . . . Who can tell if God will turn and forgive?' The King's hopes were realized; the penance and amendment were accepted. God saw that there was practical amendment; He 'saw their works, that they were turned from their evil way,' and He changed the sentence of destruction to one of mercy.

See how sorrow and amendment disarmed God's anger in such notable cases of conversion as those of St. Mary Magdalen, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Margaret of Cortona! Study their lives, if you wish to learn how God can love true penitents. See how our Lord appeared to the Magdalen; how He made St. Peter the chief pastor of His flock; how He called St. Paul to be a vessel of election; and how He gave St. Margaret the spirit of discernment and prophecy, and the power to work miracles. God gives His tokens of having accepted the repentance of those who sincerely return to Him, even as the father of the prodigal, upon his son's return, ran to meet him, fell upon his neck, kissed him, clothed him once more as became his rank, killed the fatted calf, and made a feast of rejoicing. Our Lord narrated this touching parable of the prodigal son in illustration of what He had just said: 'There

shall be joy before the Angels of God upon one sinner doing penance' (St. Luke xv. 10).

If a religious has fallen away from dutifulness and piety, she must not remain unconverted, or be only half converted. Perhaps she will say: 'I am guilty, I know, of disobedience and of disregard of some of the rules; I may cause my superior some anxiety, and may disedify my sisters; and in other ways my conduct is faulty; but there is no mortal sin in all this, so I might be worse than I am.' The important question which she should put to herself is this: 'Am I acting according to God's will and according to my vocation?' It would appear that she is following her own will, and hers is a perverse will; so there is need of conversion. She has fallen away from fervour and dutifulness; she should retrace her steps. The flower which budded under the novitiate grace should have opened to full blossom; but in the case of how many religious it droops and loses its fragrance, if it does not actually droop and die! If the religious is conscious of having fallen away from a more perfect manner of life, there is need of conversion; for not those only need it who have lost grace, but also those who have neglected or abused grace, they, too, must repent and amend.

The next advice to be given is not to put off conversion and amendment. Why defer what is so desirable, and what will be so beneficial? 'Delay not,' says Ecclesiasticus, 'to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day' (v. 8). You are not now your own; you have consecrated yourselves and your service to God. God asks of you a

perfect service, and if you have been remiss, He requires you to return without delay to dutifulness. If, therefore, you defer your conversion, you act contrary to His will, you treat Him with disrespect. The invitation to conversion is from Him. He offers you, in His goodness and mercy, a priceless grace; if you put off accepting it, you offend Him. Will He offer it again? 'To-day,' says David, 'if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts' (Ps. xciv. 8). Remember, too, that He offers you the grace in the interest of your own well-being, peace, happiness, and spiritual gain; you therefore stand in the way of your own best interests when you delay corresponding with it. Every motive, therefore, worthy of your consideration should induce you to be prompt in availing yourselves of the grace of conversion.

The last advice is that, when once you have turned, repented, and made amends, you must be careful not to turn back again; this would be to reopen the sores healed by the Heavenly Physician, and to make your last state worse than the first. Alas! that you should ever have sought your satisfaction away from God! Satan leads men to what is evil; the world enslaves them to what is vain and fleeting, and the flesh draws them after what is base and degrading. But when you turn to God, you find in Him all that can satisfy your desires and bring you peace. You adore and admire His Divine excellences, His infinite beauty and holiness, His infinite wisdom and greatness, His infinite goodness and love. What a holy attraction His service should have for you! Oh, be

careful never to quit it, or to be unfaithful in it! Say with St. Peter: 'Lord, it is good for us to be here.' Arm yourselves, therefore, against half-heartedness and discouragement, beware of bad example, and strengthen your souls by fervour in prayer and in receiving the holy Sacraments. Having, upon your conversion, entered on the path of the faithful servants of God, strive to remain ever on it, emulating their dutifulness. Do not look back towards the way of the remiss, but let the memory of your unfaithfulness urge you to perseverance in your amendment.

Does our Lord say to any among you, 'I will bring them back, because I will have mercy on them'? Are any of you called upon during this retreat to retrace your steps because you have gone backward? If so, be assured that God will give you all the graces which you need to repent sincerely, to amend effectually, and to persevere in the new life of fervour to which He calls you. How thankful you should be that He does not leave you in your imperfections and spiritual misery! He might pass you by, and give His grace to others. You do not wish this. Be resolved, then, to seek to know His will and to do it. If amendment cannot be effected without cost, remember that the fruits of it will be priceless. Address fervent prayers to the Sacred Heart of the Good Shepherd, who seeks the sheep that stray, for the grace to know your faults and to desire to amend them; and to Mary, your heavenly Mother, asking her to obtain for you true compunction and a zeal

for your correction; and be assured that if you correspond with the grace of conversion, you will taste of that joy which follows sorrow, and that it will remain with you in the holy peace and comfort of your reconciliation and renewed fidelity. 'Thou wilt turn, O God, and bring us to life, and Thy people shall rejoice in Thee' (Ps. lxxxiv. 7).

## FOURTH DAY.

### XI.

#### *GOD'S MERCY.*

'O! let Thy mercy be for my comfort.'—Ps. cxviii. 76.

All men are debtors to God's mercy. Even in the case of the just it waits upon them at birth that they may be brought to the waters of regeneration; it accompanies them through life to wash them from their stains, and it consoles them at death with a message of pardon and peace. God's mercy is to all a deep and abundant fountain of comfort and hope. Out of this fountain come the waters which heal the wounds of humanity; to it the penitent soul comes to be washed from its sins, and the soul that is oppressed with dismay and misgiving to find reassurance. It would almost seem to us that God has two ways of displaying His love—by justice His love for Himself, but by mercy His love for men. He wishes us to be moved by His mercy to turn to Him and trust Him, and to praise and love Him. Wretched indeed is the man who does not appreciate mercy.

Let us make a few reflections upon the display of

God's mercy as seen in the mystery of redemption, in God's calls to repentance, and in the Sacrament of Penance, and then pass on to consider the comfort which it brings to ourselves in particular.

All the mercy vouchsafed to mankind in general, and to all men individually, flows in some way from the fountain of redemption (Eph. i.), for by this mystery we have been purchased back for God, to receive once more the unspeakable blessings of His grace and 'the riches of the glory of His inheritance' (Eph. i. 18). The manner in which it was effected will be to us, from now and throughout eternity, a subject for wonder, admiration, and thanksgiving. God, St. Paul tells us, 'spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. How hath He not also,' St. Paul goes on to say, 'with Him given us all things?' (Rom. viii. 32). The beautiful idea of mercy emanated from God. We do not hear of it in connection with the fall of the Angels, and when our first parents fell their only thought was to hide themselves from God (Gen. iii. 8). But it was in the mind of God, who, all unasked, while pronouncing upon the human race a mitigated punishment, promised the Redeemer. When we consider the constant rebellion of man against his Creator, and the many sins by which God is continually outraged, we recognise how wonderful is the character of the Divine mercy. David proclaims it in these words: 'With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him plentiful redemption' (Ps. cxxix. 7). In all this we see the infinite value of the Precious Blood. When we consider the grievousness of sin,

and are assured that God pardons the sinner and restores him to His grace, we look around to find some explanation of how God's justice has been satisfied. We do not find it in any atonement made by the sinner, and we fail to find any adequate reason to explain it until we consider the price given in satisfaction for sin—the Precious Blood. 'You were not redeemed,' St. Peter says, 'with corruptible things as gold or silver . . . but with the Precious Blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled' (1 St. Pet. i. 18, 19). We stand further astonished in our contemplation of this mystery when we consider the profusion with which the Precious Blood was shed, and all the excruciating sufferings and excessive humiliations of the Passion. What a display of mercy this mystery reveals from whatever point we examine it! We all share in the rich benefits which follow from redemption, and all therefore should ever praise and thank God for them. The Precious Blood has been shed for every one of us, and God in His mercy has made its infinite merits available for us all.

God displays also His mercy in His calls to repentance. Although God has so mercifully and lovingly bound up the wounds of humanity by the redemption, individual souls are ever, in their wilfulness and folly, tearing off the saving bandages, and exposing their souls to eternal death. The sinner casts away grace, and makes no account of the shedding of the Precious Blood, yet God does not reject him, but sets various agencies in motion to bring about his conversion.

Even before the sinner has fallen God speaks to his conscience to save him from the fall. He sees His child running towards the fatal precipice, and strives to keep him back. Not only does God speak to the sinner's conscience, but He sometimes also places obstacles in the way of the accomplishment of the evil, or allows something to occur which should have the effect of diverting the sinner from his wicked purpose. We read, for instance, how when Cain was under the impulse of his passion, and was designing evil against Abel, God spoke to him, and said: 'Why art thou angry? And why is thy countenance fallen?' (Gen. iv. 6), and He reasoned with Cain. But all was in vain. More than once did our Lord strive to touch the heart of Judas to save him from his wicked betrayal, but all in vain.

Mercy, however, is not exhausted, even when after such warnings the sin has been committed. God does not at once visit the sinner in His anger; He bears with him, and calls him to repentance. St. Peter says that He 'dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance' (2 St. Pet. iii. 9). God even seems not to take notice of the offence which has been committed against Him; He spares the sinner, hoping to win him to true repentance. We read how when Absalom had turned against his father, and had led the forces of Israel against him, David yet determined to spare him. Before giving battle he told his generals that on no account was his son to be slain. 'Save me the boy Absalom,'

(2 Kings xviii. 5). This is a picture of how God spares the sinner, and His waiting for the sinner's return is all the more remarkable because often the sinner in the meantime continues to commit sin.

Divine mercy still exerts itself in his behalf; it sends him exhortations to repent and various warnings of his dangerous condition. The sinner may be won by the edifying words and example of others, by the remembrance of the peace he enjoyed when he was leading a devout life, by some calamity befalling another, or by the sermons he hears. He may still have a lively faith, and this will tell him of the evil of sin as seen in its terrible consequences, or remind him of God's love, of our Saviour's sufferings, and of the reward promised to the good. How long God waited for the conversion of Mary Magdalen, of the Penitent Thief, of St. Paul, and of St. Augustine! But grace triumphed in a wonderful manner at last.

Grace, having knocked for a long time at the sinner's heart, is at length listened to. The sinner seems to hear God assuring him: 'I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live' (Ezech. xxxiii. 11). He comes at last to realize the evil of which he has been guilty. His heart is softened; he knows not how he can expect pardon, but grace reassures him. He wishes the whole process of conversion to be gone through —repentance, confession, pardon, and amendment— no matter what it may cost him.

God's mercy is now displayed in the tenderness with which the penitent is received. God, as the

father in the parable, hastens to meet His prodigal son while he is 'yet a great way off,' embraces him, orders rich garments to be put on him, and rejoices in a holy festivity, because His son that was dead is come to life again (St. Luke xv. 20-32). God forgives all, and smoothens the way to a perfect reconciliation. The sinner embraces the proffered graces, and is rewarded with a happy and comforting sense of having been reconciled with God. God opens to him once more the treasury of His graces, and restores to him the deeds of the heavenly inheritance. How truly wonderful are the ways of God's mercy in calling sinners to repentance!

In the third place, let us make a few reflections upon the display of mercy as seen in the Sacrament of Penance. We may say that the very institution of this Sacrament springs from mercy. It is especially instituted to convey the grace of pardon and reconciliation; by it, when worthily received, all sins, no matter how grievous or how numerous, committed after baptism are absolutely forgiven, both as to their guilt and as to the everlasting punishment due to them. God has, then, displayed His mercy in instituting in His Church this consoling Sacrament, manifesting thus His desire to pardon all sinners, and to render easy their reconciliation with Him.

Consider with grateful admiration that the proper and immediate effect of the Sacrament of Penance is, as we have seen, the pardon of sin, and that this effect, in every worthy reception of the Sacrament, is produced absolutely. Different from a mere rite

or what is only a prayer, a Sacrament when duly received has absolute and direct efficacy, because of Christ's institution, and because in every Sacrament the invisible and principal Minister is Christ our Lord Himself. The priest is only the visible and vicarious minister who acts in our Lord's name. When, therefore, a penitent has in the Sacrament of Penance made a proper confession, accompanied by dispositions of sorrow and purpose of amendment, and the priest has pronounced the words of absolution, saying, 'I absolve thee from thy sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,' it is of faith that his sins are thereupon and thereby truly forgiven.

We see in the effect thus produced the wonderful ways of God's mercy. Consider them also in the special comfort which the penitent derives from this pronouncement of pardon, made in God's name by God's minister. Our Lord — especially by the authority conveyed in His words to His Apostles: 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them'—left in His Church this power of absolution. This power is exercised, and there is a clear announcement of its exercise every time the words of absolution are pronounced over the truly penitent in the Sacrament of Penance. The penitent therefore says to himself: 'I have now been absolved by the authority and power of Christ duly exercised by this His minister.' He knows that even if his sorrow has not been perfect contrition, but only what is termed attrition, the absolution has produced its due effect, for the Sacrament

has been validly received. He experiences wonderful comfort, because he has heard the words of pardon and reconciliation.

We see a further reason for admiring the display of God's mercy in the Sacrament of Penance, when we consider how frequently God imparts pardon through this Sacrament. St. Peter and the Apostles, standing before the council of the Jews, declared that our Lord's mission was to bring pardon to men. 'Him hath God exalted with His right hand,' they said, 'to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins' (Acts v. 31); but how often will He extend to His people this princely and saving mercy? A man, according to our Lord's command, must be willing to forgive his fellow-man even seventy times seven times (St. Matt. xviii. 22); but shall man expect as often pardon from God? We know that God has said by His prophet: 'If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow' (Isa. i. 18); but how often will God thus cleanse the sinner? God has not declared how often He will pardon us; He will not encourage presumption. We have, however, reason to be astonished at His having so often received sinners, and graciously restored them to His friendship, after their repeated falls into grievous sin. We may be sure that in the case of many grievous sinners God has in the holy Sacrament of Penance given pardon more than seventy times seven times. You, however, do not especially need to know what only God knows as to this repeated display of mercy in such cases: it is sufficient for you to consider how often you have

been, and are still, permitted to approach this Sacrament, in order that you may receive the pardon of your sins. What a wonderful display of mercy there is in your own case! I am not supposing that you have to grieve over even one mortal sin; but how often have the merits of the Precious Blood been applied to your souls in this Sacrament for the remission of your venial sins? And every time that you approached it, what an increase of sanctifying grace, and how many actual graces you received! The pardon was from God, who cleansed your soul and adorned it with spiritual gifts. What a display, therefore, of Divine mercy you behold in the repeated pardon of your sins! God does not weary of granting it while you do not weary of seeking it. You look up the vista of the life in this world which lies yet before you, and all along the way you see the fountains of mercy prepared to cleanse and comfort your soul until you reach the confines of eternity.

We now pass from these considerations of various displays of Divine mercy, to reflect upon the comfort which we derive from the thought of God's mercy. David exclaims: 'O! let Thy mercy be for my comfort.' The thought of it allays our anxiety about ourselves as to our past lives, our present condition, and our future, and also affords us comfort about those who are dear to us, both living and dead.

We have, it is true, left the past behind us; but we know that we shall meet it again at our judgment. We shall have to be judged as to it, as well as to our present conduct. If we had not a lively faith in the wonders of Divine mercy, who is

there among us who could feel quite at ease about the past? To many persons their past life presents good reason for regrets the most keen; they know that they have not observed all the Commandments, and that they have not been dutiful in rendering to God the homage and submission which all men owe Him; they feel that they have resisted grace, and neglected the means of obtaining it. How are we to explain the calmness of soul which such persons now enjoy? They are at peace, because they have repented; and repentance comforts and reassures. They would not experience this consoling result if there were no Divine mercy, or if they had misgivings about God's mercy. If there were no mercy, there would be no forgiveness, and repentance would be vain. Conceive, if you can, the universal desolation and despair which would weigh upon men if they had not this belief and trust in God's mercy, which led them to repentance, and which now inspires them with comfort, when they reflect that they have truly repented. David exclaims: 'If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it?' (Ps. cxxix. 3). If God has shown mercy to grievous sinners, has He not received with special tenderness and compassion His devoted servants, when they have repented of their offences? In Ecclesiasticus we read these comforting words: 'Behold the generations of men: and know ye that no one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded. For who hath continued in His commandment, and hath been forsaken? or who hath called upon Him, and He despised him? For God is compassionate and

merciful, and will forgive sins in the day of tribulation' (ii. 11-13). The thought, then, of God's mercy removes distressing uneasiness about the past, and reassures and comforts.

We come now to consider our present condition. We see how far we are from leading a perfect life; we are conscious of various weaknesses, if not of serious unsatisfactoriness. We are not fully impressed with a sense of reverence in our devotional exercises; we do not at other times fully control our thoughts, affections, inclinations, and impulses; and we have to confess to much selfishness and pettishness. How wanting we may declare ourselves to be in true piety, humility, charity, patience, and zeal! and many are the faults which result from these deficiencies. How painful, then, would be our condition if we felt that God looked upon us only with anger because of these faults, and that He would soon visit us with the punishment which they deserve! Such, however, is not our feeling, for we reverence God as a most merciful Father, who is willing to forgive His children, if only they turn to Him with sincere sorrow, and who bears with us notwithstanding our imperfections and frequent offences. Without permitting ourselves to presume on it, we yet find comfort, in view of our present faultiness, in the thought of God's most tender and patient mercy. We believe that God metes out to us His pardon continually as He detects in us true signs of contrition for our faults. We, on our part, give evidence of our desire to know and correct these faults, and to receive pardon for them by the frequent

and regular examination of our conscience, by our weekly confession, by our repeated acts of contrition, and by a general disposition to please Him and to avoid what would displease Him. If this correctly describes our usual conduct and dispositions, we may be filled with the consoling hope that God will abundantly flood our souls with the waters of the fountain of His mercy, particularly when we receive the Holy Sacraments and assist at Holy Mass, and also at other times.

If we are thus able to calm our minds about the past and the present, we know we have yet to face the future. What shall we say about this? What troubles us is that we have no absolute guarantee of our salvation. Experience has proved us to be unfaithful, weak and fickle; may we not fail to reach the goal of our desires? We are not yet at the end of our course, and we have to persevere to the end; the grace of final perseverance remains always above our absolute merit. Finally, we shall have to die, and to be judged. All these considerations may fill us with misgiving. We see what matters of vital importance we have to face in the future, and we know that everything depends upon our perseverance and upon our dying a good death. No one can take our place in these matters; no one can stand in judgment for us; and no one can become warrant for us. Do we realize what all this means? We begin, perhaps, to be alarmed. Oh, if God was not full of tenderness and mercy, we should be so alarmed at our own weakness, particularly in view of the labours and dangers to be encountered, and of the importance

of what is at stake, that it would be impossible for us to enjoy peace or repose. But let us be consoled, for God, 'who is rich in mercy' (Eph. ii. 4), will have a care of us; and we are confident that while we remain firm in our determination to please Him, and to be dutiful in every respect, He will not cast us off, or fail to help us in our many needs. We trust, then, that, in His mercy, He will not only bear with our infirmities during our remaining years, but that He will also be our support in death, and crown all His other graces by according us that of final perseverance.

Let us, finally, consider how the thought of God's mercy brings us comfort concerning our relations and friends, and all who are dear to us, whether living or dead.

As to the living, it consoles us to know that they are under the same dispensation of mercy as ourselves, and that God is pleased that we should try to help them by our prayers. It is true that there may be in some cases reason for distress of mind, as when any of our friends are remiss in their lives; but even in these cases we are not without hope, because our friends may yet, through God's mercy, be brought to repentance. What a beautiful example of such hope we have in the conduct of St. Monica, who continued for many years to bewail the bad life led by her son. Hope sustained her, and she had at length the consolation of witnessing her son's conversion! We may, while praying for these friends of ours, find comfort in entertaining a similar hope, because of God's astonishing mercy.

As to our relations and friends who are dead, we experience great comfort from our faith in purgatory. We believe that when men die not fully justified, yet in the state of grace, God does not reject them, but that He consigns them to purgatory to expiate in that place of cleansing the penalty which remains at their death due on account of their sins. The holy writer of the Book of Wisdom says: 'The grace of God, and His mercy, is with His Saints, and He hath respect to His chosen' (iv. 15). Like Judas Machabeus in the case of the soldiers who had fallen in battle, so we in the case of our friends may consider that they have fallen asleep with godliness, and have 'great grace laid up for them' (2 Mach. xii. 45). We hope that they have found favour at the mercy-seat, and we believe that to be a dispensation of mercy as well as of justice which consigns departed souls to a fiery purgation, because it renders them fit to enter the kingdom of everlasting bliss. When even we remember that our deceased relations and friends were not without their faults, we are comforted by the thought that by God's mercy this dispensation exists to provide for their admission finally into heaven.

Our consideration of the displays of God's mercy, and of the comfort which we derive from our faith in God's merciful dealings with men, should incite us to gratitude and to a generous service of God. How shall we adequately return thanks to God for all the mercy which He has up to the present time shown us? Let us try to enter into the fervent dispositions of David when he said: 'The mercies of the Lord I

will sing for ever. . . . For Thou hast said: Mercy shall be built up for ever in the heavens' (Ps. lxxxviii. 2, 3). Do not abuse God's mercy either by mistrust or presumption; pray for it at all times with humility and with confidence. 'Show us, O Lord, Thy mercy, and grant us Thy salvation' (Ps. lxxxiv. 8). 'O! let Thy mercy be for my comfort.' Dispose yourselves, by an abiding sorrow for sin, which you will renew explicitly in your acts of contrition, and by a continual devotedness to God's service, to experience its full efficacy in the holy Sacrament of Penance, and at other times when you are aware that your conduct has been faulty. Strive also to merit a special measure of it by your own merciful dealings with others—by practising according to your opportunities what are known as the works of mercy, and by manifesting a compassionate spirit in your relations with others who are at fault; for our Lord has said: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' (St. Matt. v. 7). May God ever display His tender mercy towards you, to draw you to greater love of Him, to assuage your fears, to give you peace of heart, and to reassure and comfort you; that you may be animated ever more and more with fervour and confidence in His service, and look forward hopefully to the end. And may you be able to join with David in saying: 'But I, as a fruitful olive-tree in the house of God, have hoped in the mercy of God for ever, yea for ever and ever' (Ps. li. 10).

## XII.

### *PIETY.*

'Be you in all manner of conversation holy; because it is written: You shall be holy, for I am holy.'—1 ST. PET. i. 15, 16.

WHILE you are desirous in this retreat of particularizing the efforts which you ought to make for your advancement in religious virtue and observance, lest by taking only a general view of your obligations you might seem content with what would be vague and undetermined, there is yet one spirit which should pervade your general conduct, and which you should resolve to foster and give development to at all times—I mean piety. Piety should enter not only into your devotional exercises, but also into the character of your lives, and should be the spirit pervading all your works.

In this conference we will speak of piety as that spirit of devotedness to all that concerns the worship and service of God, which is deeply seated in the hearts of devout Christians, and which displays itself in the religiousness of their lives. It may be said that, if this spirit has its home in good Christian families, it has its sanctuary in the convents of devout religious. The general faithful respect them because of their

consecration to God, and also because they are edified by that religiousness of mind and affection which impresses itself upon all their conduct, and imparts a tone to their whole surrounding. You will do well, then, to foster this spirit, which draws its life and unction from grace and holiness of purpose. This is the exhortation implied in the words of St. Peter: 'Be you in all manner of conversation holy.'

The religiousness observable in convents edifies seculars, but it is not exclusively confined to these abodes of virtue—it is found in the homes of the devout throughout the Church; and religious also may derive edification from the lives of pious seculars. Ask yourselves, then, before we proceed to consider the benefits resulting from piety, what you observe in a pious secular. His exterior conduct will bespeak to some extent the character of his interior dispositions. 'Every good tree,' our Lord has said, 'bringeth forth good fruit' (St. Matt. vii. 17); 'A good man out of a good treasure bringeth forth good things' (St. Matt. xii. 35). Piety is not as a tone assumed only upon particular occasions, as in prayer; it pervades the whole conduct. You observe, then, that the pious secular is strict in all becomingness; that he does not content himself with only striving to avoid what is sinful, but that he endeavours also to fulfil the lessons and instructions of our Lord which are proper to his state of life; that he is regular in assisting at Mass and in approaching the holy Sacraments; that he is faithful to prayer, and is to be seen at the various services of the Church;

that he is assiduous in attending to the duties of his calling; and that he is charitable in word and work. In these and other ways the pious secular sanctifies his life, and diffuses around him the odour of edification.

You see in all this the working of the grace of the Holy Ghost. 'There are,' St. Paul tells us, 'diversities of graces, but the same Spirit. . . . And the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man unto profit. . . . All these things one and the same Spirit worketh, dividing to every one according as He will' (1 Cor. xii. 4-11). The same Divine Spirit works also by His grace in you and by you.

If you see in the pious secular so much that is commendable and edifying, what should be expected in you as religious? How sincere and practical should be your piety! In proof of it, with what reverence and fervour you should assist at Mass and receive the holy Sacraments; with what devotedness you should perform your religious exercises and practise observance; how ready should be your obedience, how exact your dutifulness, and how thoughtful your charity; and how attractive to you should be everything that concerns the worship of God, the honour of our Lord and of His holy Mother and the Saints, the good of souls, and the benefit of the Church! In these and such ways should piety be manifested, to the edification of the Church, in a religious community; and it becomes every member of a community to seek to acquire and to foster this desirable spirit.

By what I have so far said I have endeavoured to explain and illustrate what I mean by that practical spirit of piety of which I am treating in this conference. Let us now pass on to consider how beneficial it should prove in various ways.

Piety is a help to the soul at every stage of life, and particularly in times of difficulty and temptation; but we note its special usefulness in prayer, and in its influence upon our spirituality. Moreover, piety is a preservative against sin, and a powerful aid to virtue. These are the various benefits which we will study with a view to impress upon our minds the excellence and utility of an earnest spirit of piety.

It is very important to instil a spirit of piety into the hearts of the young while they are so impressionable, and in such danger of not realizing the true duty of life. In the first stage of life the young depend upon others for direction, and happy will it be for them if those who direct them are themselves impressed with a true sense of religiousness. The beautiful vessel which leaves port in the morning and sails out on the open sea may before nightfall become a wreck if not commanded by an experienced mariner. How many lives have been wrecked long before old age because youth was badly tutored! Where, however, the young are trained to piety, what consoling results usually follow! Piety helps to steady their unstable dispositions, to master their purposeless efforts, to draw them instinctively from evil, to train them to dutifulness, and to form them to religiousness. When manhood has been reached,

piety is equally needed to prevent a man from being too much engrossed by secular pursuits; to withhold him from the slavery of his passions, and from being contaminated by the irreligious atmosphere in which he may find himself; to raise his mind to realize his responsibilities; and to direct him in the fulfilment of his duties to God, to his own soul, to those committed to his care, and to his neighbour generally. Piety will help him materially in all these respects, and will prove to him a source of great comfort under the vicissitudes of life. Finally, when old age has been reached, piety is needed to reassure a man after he has come through the struggles of life, and when he is drawing towards the close of his earthly career. It is needed to move him to feed his mind with salutary thoughts, and to guard him against any pernicious impressions which it may have received during other stages of his life; it is needed to remove his affections from inordinate attachment to this world and to creatures, lest such attachment may prevent him from making a good preparation for the life to come; and it is needed to guide him in making this good preparation, and to help him to bear with becoming patience the ills and inconveniences attendant upon old age. In every stage of life, and in every calling, piety, as a heavenly-sent blessing, will comfort, guide, and protect us, if only we appreciate and foster it; for by it we seek to please God, to practise dutifulness, and to turn to good account the various means available for our sanctification; and God will in return recompense us by bestowing upon us the care of a special pro-

vidence. 'They that seek the Lord,' says David, 'shall not be deprived of any good' (Ps. xxxiii. 11).

We have especially in times of difficulties and temptation to reckon with our natural weakness. Then especially, therefore, do we need supernatural help. Then, while the tepid and indifferent are dragged down by their irresolution, frailty, and disheartenment, the pious and fervent steady their souls by a holy determination and by resolute action, accompanied by prayer. See, for instance, the difference of conduct manifested by these two classes under a severe temporal loss or family bereavement. The less religious give vent to the violence of their feelings, and seem to lose sight of the action of Divine providence in the matter; they are often intemperate in their speech, and thoroughly broken-hearted. The pious, under the same circumstances, feel the blow which they have experienced; but they bend to the will of God, and recognise God's supreme right to regulate according to His own good-pleasure all that concerns them. They pray for patience and for guidance, and they say nothing but what is edifying and in keeping with their pious dispositions. See in this the practical benefit of piety. Piety leads us to run to God in all our difficulties; we ask Him to avert those calamities which we foresee as likely to befall us, and to sustain us when actually in distress or affliction.

Piety also sustains us under temptation; it leads us to abhor the evil to which we feel tempted, and to take steps to resist it. How readily a short prayer or pious ejaculation comes to the lips of the pious!

And this is the first step towards their triumph over the temptation. On the other hand, Christians who are devoid of piety are often ensnared and overcome, because they do not instinctively turn to God for help, and because they are dilatory in dealing with the temptation. The genuineness of piety is put to the test in times of trial, opposition, and temptation; for in such times we have to prove our earnest devotedness to God's service and to the dispositions of His will, and to manifest our true religiousness. Piety will keep the soul braced up to preserve, and persevere in, its dutifulness, and God says of His trustful servant: 'Because he hoped in Me, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he hath known My name. . . . I am with him in tribulation' (Ps. xc. 14, 15). Where, however, piety is wanting, there will be an unguardedness, a want of effort, and an absence of prayer, which will leave the soul exposed to its natural weakness, and to the power of evil influences.

If piety both moves us to the actual performance of every duty, and also inspires us with the spirit of dutifulness with which every duty should be accomplished, how especially useful it will be in prayer! Piety will be, as it were, in its own element in prayer, and it will lead us to practise and to relish prayer; it will inspire us with that devotion which makes prayer acceptable to God and profitable to ourselves. Where there is but little piety, there will be tediousness and distractedness. Who are the religious who neglect or shorten their meditations and devotional exercises, who readily avail themselves of excuses for omitting

them, and who find the time of prayer long and wearisome? Who are the religious who find but little pleasure in communing with God, with our Divine Lord, and with our Blessed Lady or the Saints, but who are ever ready to entertain themselves, even at forbidden times, with their sisters in religion or with seculars? Are they not religious who are deficient in piety? You understand, of course, that these questions are not to be applied by you to the examination of the conduct of others, but only to the examination of your own conduct. The religious who is pious will go with alacrity and pleasure to prayer, and she will feel thankful that so much time each day is consecrated to exercises of piety. She recognises that if piety is so necessary to make prayer acceptable and profitable, it is also fed in prayer; she must pray in order to preserve and foster her pious dispositions. It should not be matter for wonder that those are deficient in true piety who fail to nourish it by meditation and prayer.

Piety, moreover, exercises a beneficial influence upon our spirituality, both in regard of our manner of viewing things and of our motives in what we do. You have to be on your guard, as religious devoted to God's service, against viewing things from any point except that of our Lord's teaching. As of old there were various schools of philosophy, each with its following of disciples, so in every age and now are there many systems of reasoning, leading men to view things from different standpoints. There are some from which, within their own range, if others, and particularly the supernatural, be not excluded,

just and proper views may be obtained—as the standpoints of the educational, the scientist, the social, the financial, and the commercial systems—and others which unhappily embrace in their principles various errors—such as the standpoints of what we understand as the materialist, the rationalist, the socialist, and the secularist systems—but that from which you have particularly to view things is the standpoint of spirituality and religiousness. You have to consider in all matters their relation to God's honour and glory, their bearing upon man's supernatural and everlasting destiny, and that instruction and direction concerning them which is found in our Lord's teaching. You will take your views from the Divine Teacher of men, and the spiritual light in which you will form your judgments, and which you will use as your guide, will raise you above all other systems of reasoning, and establish you in the regions of immutable truth. This is only to say that, if you view things as our Lord would have you to judge of them, your judgment will certainly be a true and wise one. The follower of our Lord who is imbued with a spirit of piety will desire no other light or guidance for his soul, or for his spiritual path in life, than that which he finds in our Lord's teaching. Try, then, as pious religious, to form your ideas and judgments by the light of spiritual and religious teaching, and leave to others discussions which may mislead, dissipate, or distract.

Piety will also influence, to your spiritual benefit, the motives which actuate you in your conduct. Unreal and futile would be your spirituality if you

were to neglect the guidance of your motives, for piety, as we are viewing it, means religious devotedness to God's service in our whole lives, and this devotedness has its seat in the heart, upon the sentiments and motives of which it impresses its own spiritual character. The pious religious will therefore say to herself from time to time: 'Am I labouring from a proper motive? Have I in view to please God in all I do?' To direct our whole conduct in regard to God's service and to duty, in regard to ourselves and to others, by motives pleasing to God—as dictated by the principles and requirements of the spiritual life—is the truest practical piety. You cannot but recognise and appreciate the value of the spirit of piety when you reflect upon this result of it; and in this result you have to include the protection which piety at the same time affords you against the influence on your conduct of motives of pride, selfishness, uncharitableness, and sensuality, all of which motives are opposed to your spiritual welfare and supernatural gain, and lowering to your Christian and religious character.

After what we have so far seen of the beneficial influence of piety upon our whole life—at its different stages and in our entire conduct—especially at times of difficulty and temptation, and its particular usefulness in prayer and in promoting our spiritual welfare, it will not now be necessary to dwell at any length upon the consideration of piety as a preservative against sin and as a powerful aid to virtue.

Piety inspires us with a dread of sin. It puts into our heart the words of Joseph: 'How can I do this

wicked thing ?' (Gen. xxxix. 9). Although we remain conscious of our weakness and of our unfortunate proclivity to evil, the spirit of piety yet leads us to dread and detest every kind of sin. The detestation of sin is a most necessary disposition to deter us from its commission, and a necessary element in true conversion. It is evident, from what we have seen, that the end which the pious chiefly propose to themselves is to please God ; and although they may from time to time be overtaken in certain faults, they are not likely to fall away from God's service. We are all the more convinced of this by witnessing the sorrow which they feel when they see that they have had the misfortune to commit any fault. Their piety inspires them with a hearty sorrow, and leads them to a speedy and sincere repentance. Piety may therefore correctly be reckoned a preservative against sin.

Piety also prepares the soul for virtue, nourishes the virtues which are planted by grace in it, and helps to strengthen them and to stimulate their practice. The pious are the friends of God and His devoted servants. Their dispositions in His service become as the good ground, ready to render fruitful the graces which God bestows. The fruits of grace are virtues and good works, and these fruits are chiefly noticeable in the pious. We conclude, then, that piety furthers the work of grace. The pious feed their minds with good thoughts and desires, by useful reading and meditation. They pray, hear Mass, and receive the holy Sacraments, and thus draw grace from its many channels. Moreover, they

avoid the company of the wicked and associate with the virtuous, and thus live in a wholesome moral atmosphere, and receive the benefit of edification. And, finally, they avail themselves of opportunities of doing good, thus putting in practice the lessons with which their religious training has furnished them. The pious do all these things. Is it not manifest that such conduct leads them to love and practise virtue? 'Religiousness,' says the holy writer, 'shall keep and justify the heart; it shall give joy and gladness' (Ecclus. i. 18). What is this but to say that it shall have its fruit in virtue?

To you also is said: 'Be you in all manner of conversation holy; because it is written: You shall be holy, for I am holy.' Your character and calling, your mode of life and your works, demand in you an ever-living and ever-active spirit of piety. Without this, what will be your dispositions in prayer and in the reception of the holy Sacraments, and in what spirit will you practise religious observance? Piety must actuate you in all you do, and give a tone to your whole conduct.

Early training and formation in piety is very desirable. You see, therefore, how important a feature piety is in the bringing up of novices. The cultivation of piety should not, however, cease to receive attention afterwards, but it should be maintained at all times. How painful it would be to meet with elders in religion devoid of piety! If you are sincere religious, the longer you are in religion the more devoted in spirit and work you ought to be, and piety so long nurtured and practised should become in you as a confirmed habit.

Remember, however, that there is such a thing as false piety, a piety which, disregarding the rules of a wise direction and the lessons derived from experience, follows a path of its own. There is also a piety which is hypocritical, because it exists only in a conduct maintained to gain confidence or esteem, or to achieve some selfish end. And there is, finally, a piety which is superficial. It is wanting in solidity. It shows itself on the surface, and is unstable and fluctuating, and likely to be short-lived, because the spirit of piety is not seriously cultivated. Piety which is superficial, hypocritical, or false, is like the lance of base metal: it may be in appearance well polished and handsome, but when borne into the lists it will be broken at the first shock.

In conclusion, I invite every religious to ask herself to what extent she contributes to the character of piety in her community—not only to give thereby due edification, but especially to please the eye of God, and to gratify the Sacred Heart of her Lord and Master; and to examine also what zeal she has for good in herself and in others. Strive that your piety may be built up on the sincerity of your love of God, untainted by vanity or a desire of esteem. Let it be practical, in the ways which I have already pointed out, in both prayer and work. Thus will you prove yourselves to be earnest in trying to please God, and God will bestow upon you the regard and special favours which He reserves for His fervent servants. The royal psalmist says: 'He will do the will of them that fear Him; and He will hear their prayer, and save them: the Lord keepeth all them that love Him' (Ps. cxliv. 19, 20).

## XIII.

### *DEATH.*

'The end of all is at hand.'—1 St. Pet. iv. 7.

Every year, every annual retreat, sees you nearer to the close of your sojourn on earth. You know that this should afford you satisfaction and consolation, that you should exclaim with David, 'Woe is me, that my sojourning is prolonged!' (Ps. cxix. 5), and should wish to enter soon into the haven of eternal rest; but do you really entertain sentiments of this kind? Possibly you do not, for you may even look upon death with dread. It is true that you do not desire to be kept back from your heavenly home, yet you have no wish for death. There are to be found in the world men who would seem to wish to live for ever in this scene of labour, anxiety, suffering, uncertainty and peril, only because they dread to die. Nature dreads the dissolution of our present state of existence, on the horizon of which hangs a veil which she cannot penetrate. At death the soul will, as it were, gather itself together, and, sallying forth from the body, will take its flight—but whither? In what direction and how far shall the soul speed

its way? Science and research supply no answer to these questions.

Whether you will it or not, you are ever drawing nearer and nearer to death. How silently it approaches! Presently it will be at hand, it will overtake you; you will pass away; the world will go on as usual, but you will not be in it; others will take up your place and duties. There will then be no further trace of you in life than there remains of the bird that has sped its flight through the air, or of the ship that has passed over the deep waters. All this has happened in the case of millions and millions of men who have gone before you, and it will happen also in your case. There has been a multiplicity of lives, there have been as many deaths; yet in all this multiplicity every life has been an individual life, and every death has been an individual death. Every life singly has been fully registered in God's book; and every death, singly, too, has also been therein registered with equal fidelity. God cannot lose count of those whom He has created and redeemed; nor does He fail to reckon with any concerning the life and blessings which He has bestowed. To every one was pointed out the way of salvation; to every one was offered the grace necessary to attain it; many were called, but few were chosen.

When the subject of death engrosses your thoughts, there are especially two conclusions which force themselves upon you: the one is that you must all die; and the other, that when you come to die you will be either lost or saved.

The worldly and the thoughtless in the full swing

of life seldom think of death—they avoid the thought of it; yet the thought of it would profit them, it would prove to them a wonderfully effective grace. But you in your meditations cannot fail at times to approach the subject, and you note the lessons which it teaches. You come calmly face to face with it; you know that even though it may not yet be at the door, it is not far off; that, as the wise woman of Thecua said to David, 'We all die, and like the waters that return no more, we fall down into the earth' (2 Kings xiv. 14); that, as St. Paul said, 'It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment' (Heb. ix. 27). You do not, therefore, entertain hopes which may never be realized, promising yourselves a long life; nor do you confide in receiving a long notice of the approach of death, or in its coming just as you wish it.

In connection with the subject of the certainty of your having to die, your reflections should lead you to persuade yourselves that sooner or later your time will come; that you should keep yourselves ever ready; and that you should know how to meet death when it comes.

In the first place, therefore, try to realize the fact that sooner or later you must die. 'Who is the man,' asks David, 'that shall live and not see death?' (Ps. lxxxviii. 49). Unquestionably you will die; death is the penalty of sin: in Adam all men sinned, and all incurred the penalty. Then there are also your own actual sins. You must undergo this universal penalty; you have no thought of escaping it. But when? This is wisely hidden from you,

and you can only answer indeterminately, 'Sooner or later.' Ecclesiasticus says: 'Remember that death is not slow' (xiv. 12). There is the possibility of your meeting with a sudden death. No promise has been made to you that you shall not meet with any of the fatalities which have taken others suddenly out of life, or that you shall not be carried off all unawares by some sudden illness or disease. 'You know not,' our Lord has said, 'when the lord of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning' (St. Mark xiii. 35). You do not know at what age you shall die; nothing is certain as to the time when the summons will reach you. St. Paul says: 'the time is short: it remaineth that . . . they that weep be as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not . . . and they that use this world as if they used it not' (1 Cor. vii. 29-31); so little would he have us reckon on the duration of life. How many religious of your institute have died young! A certain number have reached a ripe age, but perhaps most have died in their very prime. You are quite unable to surmise the kind of disease which shall cause your death, or which sickness will be your last. How many men who have appeared doomed to die have rallied and recovered their health and strength! but even more who counted on recovery have been carried off. And when your last sickness shall come, you will be unable to say if it is to be a lingering one or a short one, or if it will afford you an opportunity of making a pious preparation for your departure. The bells that shall toll your funeral knell are already swing-

ing in their belfry; and die you must, sooner or later: this is what you should in the first place try to realize. You have to follow those whose earthly career is over, and who have gone before you; their tombs speak more eloquently to you by their solemn, unbroken silence than many discourses.

In the second place, you should be convinced of the wisdom and necessity of keeping yourselves ever ready for death. This conviction should follow from what you have been considering concerning the uncertainty of the time, and nature, and circumstances of your death; also from what you have wished for others, and have seen desirable in their case. There are cases in which the priest, summoned to a death-bed, has the consolation of finding that the sick man has long kept himself, by a good Christian life and by the practice of piety, in a state of preparation. The priest at once looks upon him as one of the predestined. With what fervent religious dispositions the sick man receives the priest's administrations! But there are also cases in which the priest, on reaching the death-bed, is differently impressed. How painful it is to discover that the sick man has lived negligently, and has not given death a thought! How the priest has in such a case to exercise his zeal and charity to enliven the sick man's faith, to stimulate his hope, and to inflame his charity! Perhaps the priest has evidence only of attrition when he pronounces the words of absolution; what an absence of fervour there is from the sick man's reception of the Holy Viaticum, what an uneasiness in his whole bearing, and what a difficulty the priest

experiences in bringing him to a sense of resignation! In some other cases the priest, proceeding with all haste, arrives too late at the death-bed, and at times he is sent for after death has actually occurred. What anxiety, and perhaps sad misgiving, these last cases give rise to! The priest inquires what kind of life was led by these deceased, and if they asked for a priest.

Look upon these examples as practical illustrations of the close of life in the majority of cases; should they not convince you of how dangerous and foolish it would be on the part of any man to put off his preparation until the last, or to trust to the uncertainty of a death-bed repentance? You cannot but acknowledge the wisdom and necessity of being ever ready, because of the uncertainty of the time of your death, and because you wish to provide for a happy death. You desire to be spared from having anything unsatisfactory about the manner of your death, whether it comes upon you suddenly or with timely notice.

What should be said, then, if you are being carried away, in the bustle of life, by various engrossing desires and ambitions; or if, drifting heedlessly with the current, you are directing your course now one way and now another, being at one time fervent, at another dissipated? Ah, by the light of your faith you see that God's design in giving you being, and enriching you with heavenly blessings, was not that you should be actuated by worldly or selfish motives; you have not received existence to take away from the glory of your Creator, but to add to it; not to

centre your affections on your own miserable personality ; not to court the flattery or inordinate affection of others ; not to lead an easy and comfortable life, and to waste attention on the wretched body : not for these or any such insignificant and uninspiring aims, but for what is nobler and more sublime—to give glory to God in the sphere of life to which you have been called, to labour earnestly for your future destiny, to live faithful to grace, and to close your career by a holy and happy death. The surest way to secure for yourselves a holy death is a holy life ; therefore the sanctification of the time present, by dutifulness and piety, should stamp itself upon your minds as the only work worthy of your preoccupation and effort. What, I ask, will the enjoyment of any unworthy gratification, the achievement of all other aims, or the attainment of every other satisfaction, avail you, if at death—come when it may—you find yourselves unprepared for it. If, however, your life has happily been a becoming preparation, then with what comparative composure you will meet the trying ordeal awaiting you at its close ! With the aged and venerable St. Hilarion you will be able to drive away the temptation to misgiving, saying, 'Why art thou alarmed, O my soul, why in trepidation ? For so many years thou hast served thy God, and art thou now afraid to die ?' Be persuaded, then, that if you wish to have dispositions which will enable you to receive the last Sacraments with earnest faith and piety, and which will reconcile you to God's summons, and produce peace in your souls, you must not wait till death is upon you, but you must

make your lives a preparation for your death. What will this be but to keep yourselves ever ready for death?

The third consideration—that you should know how to meet death when it comes—places you face to face with death already at hand. The other two considerations—that you must sooner or later die, and that you should be always ready for death—may appear more practical at the present stage of your existence, and more suitable to the retreat; but this third consideration should prove useful in pointing out how to make the immediate preparation—the others deal with the remote preparation—and therefore in impressing you with the sacredness and solemnity of the final scene of life. A priest familiar with death scenes would suggest four things which would tend to secure a holy death. His first suggestion would be that you should receive the Sacraments at an early stage of any critical sickness. In this matter you cannot be judges in your own cause; you should therefore ask to see your confessor and your superior, and leave the decision in their hands. But you may, and you should, at once make your confession. Sometimes, unfortunately, the reception of the Sacraments has been put off; and then finally it was attended to when the sick man was scarcely able to enter fully into what he was doing, and the holy Sacraments had to be administered even in a hurried manner. If the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist are necessary to you in the battle of life, they certainly should not be neglected in its final and decisive strife; and Extreme Unction has been instituted by our Lord especially to supply

the soul with the graces which it needs in sickness and at death. In these holy Sacraments the hand of God is invisibly stretched out to you to heal, support, invigorate, and console; their efficacy is Divine. In your last sickness, the help which the world, your friends, and your sisters in religion, can give you, will be of little avail in comparison with the benefits which God's own hand will bestow upon you through the Sacraments.

The second suggestion which an experienced priest would offer is that you should confer with your confessor as to your spiritual condition, and as to the acts which should be made during your sickness. A priest does not approach the bedside to make only the inquiries which a physician makes. The object of a physician's care is the body; a priest comes to assist the soul, and to help to dispose the sick for their passage from life, if it should be God's will that they should die. Speak, then, with confidence to your confessor when he is brought to you in any grave sickness, and strive to correspond in a spirit of faith, docility, and humility with the advice which he gives and the suggestions which he makes. He is the minister of Jesus Christ, whom he represents; there is a guidance in his counsels which has the Divine blessing.

A third suggestion is that it would be well to close your attention to unnecessary communication with your friends and relations, and even with the members of your community, about worldly concerns; and to have removed from you everything which would be likely to disturb your preparation for your journey

into eternity. The time may be drawing near, in any dangerous illness, when your eyes will be closed to this world; so your thoughts and your dealings should rather be with the world to come, and your attention should be concentrated seriously upon the business in hand. Let nothing be wanting in the exactitude, efficiency, and fervour of your preparation. With David you may then say: 'O Lord, make me know my end. And what is the number of my days: that I may know what is wanting to me' (Ps. xxxviii. 5).

An experienced priest would offer you, as a fourth and last suggestion, the advice to pray much—at least, in desire—and to practise during your illness union with God. Unite your sufferings with those of your Divine Redeemer, and keep yourself as recollected as possible. Make also acts of the principal virtues, employ frequent ejaculatory prayers, and from time to time make an act of Spiritual Communion. Ask to be permitted to receive Holy Viaticum as often as may be, and also to renew publicly your consecration to God by repeating aloud the formula of your vows. Amongst the acts which you should make in every case of sickness, but especially when you believe that your last illness has come upon you, is an act of entire resignation to God's designs in your regard; and even as our Lord, when in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemani, repeated His act three several times, so should you, uniting yourself with Him, repeat yours frequently, saying: 'Not my will, but Thine be done' (St. Luke xxii. 42)—thus to offer the most accept-

able homage of your will to the Divine will in the most momentous incident of your mortal career. Lastly, raise your thoughts and your prayers often to the Church Triumphant which you hope soon to join; invoke constantly the intercession of your Immaculate Mother, of St. Joseph—the patron of a happy death—of your Guardian Angel, of your holy Patrons, and of all the Blessed.

If you keep before you these suggestions, which the experience of the priestly ministry points out as useful and desirable to be followed, you will know how, in the third place, you should meet death when it comes; but you must study in particular during the retreat the matter of the first two considerations, which should guide you in your present and future conduct; for when death actually comes, your sickness may be of such a nature as to indispose you for serious thought and prayer.

You have thus far seen that you should try to realize that sooner or later your turn to die will come; that you should be in a state of continual preparedness for death; and that you should know how to meet death when it comes. Dwell now for a few moments upon this second momentous thought which the subject of death suggests: when you die, you will be lost or you will be saved. If you die in the state of mortal sin, you will be lost; if happily you die in God's grace, you will be saved. The two final goals, the two final issues of man's mortal career, which shall be reached in the resurrection and decide his eternal destiny, have been revealed to us by our Lord. 'They that have done good things,' He said,

'shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment' (St. John v. 29), that is—of condemnation. We will here leave out of our considerations the intermediary purgation of the elect, of which St. Pau says: 'If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire' (1 Cor. iii. 15); for such a man 'shall come forth unto the resurrection of life.'

I invite you to introduce into your reflections upon death this momentous consideration of both of the final issues, namely, of reprobation and of salvation, not because I have a fear that any of you will be lost, but because the dread possibility of such an issue should exercise a wholesome influence in saving you from it. There are, however, sad circumstances, happily absent in your case, in which the possibility might come nearer to a probability; may you never bring yourselves into relation with them! may you rather seek by every means in your power to make even more secure the realization of your present consoling hopes with regard to the great issue of life! Elements of doubt, danger, and insecurity in this momentous affair would be introduced if a religious ceased to safeguard her vows; if through heedlessness or temptation she were to fall into the habit of grievous sin; if she came to give grave scandal, and persevered in giving it; if she were to become devoid of right principle, and followed the directions of her own waywardness; if she were to become religious only in name; and, finally, if she were to become guilty of the sin of sacrilege by abusing the holy

Sacraments. What a falling away such conduct would suppose! But remember, if a religious falls her fall is very great; she abuses richer graces than those usually bestowed upon seculars. There have been such falls in the past; happily, they have been very rare; they are for your warning. If in a lesser way any religious has given rise to misgiving, let her consider the stings of her conscience as a voice of God calling her to correction and amendment. The way of repentance is open to her, and God's mercies may yet win her back and place her once more in the right path. There is, we are confident, no reason to ask if she will turn and be converted; or if, like so many sinners who are impenitent, she will remain cold and hardened, disregarding the proffered mercy; or if she will allow the end to come before she has sought forgiveness and reconciliation. 'The end of all is at hand,' but will the sinner then be able to release himself from the bonds of sin, when Satan will make his last effort to hold him enthralled? These thoughts are for your consideration. I suggest them not because you have strayed into the paths of evil or of peril, but that you may be more and more convinced of the danger of such paths.

There is, happily, another and a brighter issue to your mortal career than that which lies beyond the horizon of the life of the wicked—there is the gate of salvation. If you remain true to your vocation, you will surely reach that gate by which you will pass into eternal life. Upon what grounds do you expect it? Because you have left all things for our Lord's 'name's sake,' and He has promised that you 'shall

receive a hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting' (St. Matt. xix. 29). Moreover, you are nourished frequently with the Bread of Life, and our Lord has said: 'He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day' (St. John vi. 55). O good religious, 'hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown' (Apoc. iii. 11). Say confidently with David: 'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance . . . it is Thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me' (Ps. xv. 5). Death comes. O dying religious, spouse of Christ, the hour is at hand that you should enter into your inheritance and possess the portion laid up for you! Cease now your labours; part with your anxieties; bid adieu to your superiors and to your sisters in religion; leave your cell, your oratory, your workroom; quit the earth which you have trodden and all the scenes of your exile; for the time of your sojourning is at an end, the term of your sufferings, humiliations and toil has at last been reached, your sacrifice is now complete, and the Divine promises are about to be realized. Depart to hear the consoling words: 'Well done, good and faithful servant! enter thou into the joy of thy Lord' (St. Matt. xxv. 21).

With such a happy consummation awaiting you, you are forced to admit that our Divine Lord has taken the sting out of death; you will not therefore look forward to it as those do who are without hope. You take inspiration from the words, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: from henceforth, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours'

(Apoc. xiv. 13). You bow to the decree which has already sentenced you to die; you await its fulfilment. St. Peter says: 'The end of all is at hand.' If God, however, leaves you still in the land of your exile, you will look upon this as a merciful dispensation, intended to afford you a longer time to prepare for a happy death; and you will gratefully and dutifully avail yourselves of this concession of time. You will keep yourselves ever ready; you will not do anything that would jeopardize the decisive issue of your lives; but you will rather give earnest and continual attention to your sanctification, for you are fully persuaded that a holy death follows and closes a holy life. You will therefore remove from your manner of life everything that is unwise, remiss, ill-regulated, negligent and dangerous; and, renewed in the fervour of your mind, putting your lives with trust and confidence in the hands of God, and under the protection of your heavenly Mother and St. Joseph, you will devote yourselves with fidelity and piety to all the duties of your calling. Such a life will not be without its consolation; for, buoyed up by Christian hope and laden with many merits, you may then expect from the goodness, mercy and love of God the grace to die in the holy and peaceful dispositions of the predestined. This is what you desire, and you express your wish in the words of Balaam: 'Let my soul die the death of the just, and my last end be like to them' (Num. xxiii. 10).

## FIFTH DAY.

### XIV.

### *THE DISCIPLINE OF OBEDIENCE.*

'The care of discipline is love, and love is the keeping of her laws.'—WISD. vi. 19.

THE teaching and discipline of wisdom result in the happiness of those who accept and embrace them. The truly wise value the lessons which wisdom teaches, and seek to walk according to her guidance; but men who disdain discipline will be carried away by disorder. Where there is no discipline there is an absence of wisdom. Discipline conveys to our mind the idea of correction, restraint, and keeping in order; painful as it may be, it is yet necessary to us in our present imperfect condition of being. What is opposed to our perfection is opposed to our happiness. Our natural waywardness and our irregular desires and passions are obstacles to our perfection, and therefore to our happiness. Discipline is needed to correct them, and to direct our conduct according to the laws of wisdom; we

should therefore value it, and count it necessary for our happiness.

The holy writer of the Book of Wisdom says that 'the care of discipline is love'—that is, that the desire of discipline, and attention to its wise demands, will produce charity, for the more completely we overcome our disorderly inclinations, the greater sway will charity have over us. Then he goes on to say: 'Love is the keeping of wisdom's laws'; for charity leads us to a perfect observance of the commandments. If we love our friend, we will do his behests; if we love the King, we will observe his laws; and if we love God, we will keep His commandments.*

I invite you to apply these reflections to the discipline of obedience wisely imposed upon religious. A zeal for this discipline betokens wisdom, and it will cause happiness; then, if you have this desire of discipline, and correspond with what discipline demands, you will grow in charity and in your appreciation of your holy vocation, with the happy consequence that you will love and observe your rules, and conform yourselves dutifully with the requirements of your state. If, however, a religious disdains or disregards discipline, her religious life will be one of disorder, and consequently of imperfection and unhappiness.

You recognise that you need a corrective on account of your waywardness or sluggishness; discipline supplies this. You also acknowledge that you require a prudent safeguard and a discreet guide

* See Corn. a Lap. *in loco.*

on account of the perhaps imprudent impulses of your zeal; the discipline of obedience provides these. This wise discipline, moreover, so regulates the employment given to the religious of an institute as to take into account the talents of each and the requirements of the various works for which the institute is responsible. The utility and necessity of the discipline of obedience should for these reasons be apparent.

You ought to appreciate this discipline not only for the reasons of its utility, but also because you yourselves have accepted it voluntarily. It has not been forced upon you; you have sought it and embraced it. When you entered the novitiate and received the holy habit—even before you made your profession—you felt happy in knowing that you had offered your will to God. You said to yourselves: 'Now I must obey; my life must now be regulated by holy obedience. I must, for God's sake, be submissive to my superiors; I must observe the rule; I must look upon the lawful commands of my superiors as the commands of Jesus Christ.' The discipline under which you then willingly and joyfully placed yourselves was the holy yoke of religion. In embracing it you were following that perhaps arduous but privileged vocation which God had given you, for God called you to embrace, not a life of independence and immortification, but a life of submission, obedience, and restraint. You have accepted the discipline of obedience willingly because of your love of the virtue of obedience. You love this exalted virtue because you see how our Lord

loved it and practised it. He was subject during the greater part of His life on earth to Mary and Joseph, and at all times the law of His heavenly Father was in the midst of His heart (Ps. xxxix. 9). You love obedience because the Saints have loved it. How admirable, for instance, was the obedience of St. Teresa and of Blessed Margaret Mary! These and other Saints were often severely tried, because their superiors seemed incredulous in regard of the supernatural favours and instructions which were vouchsafed to them; but they yet followed the injunctions of obedience. We read in the 'Life of Blessed Margaret Mary' that our Lord upon an occasion, after warning her against Satan and his deceits, said to her: 'Do nothing without the approbation of those who guide you; for as long as you are under the authority of obedience, he will be unable to deceive you; he has no power over the obedient.' You love obedience because it moulds your soul according to the pattern of holiness; it forms you to other virtues, and it helps to protect you against evil influences. While you are faithful to religious obedience, you are saved from the misleading of your own judgment when it is wrong, and of your own will when it is evil, and from the insinuating false guidance of others. Finally, you love obedience, and you have placed yourself under its discipline because of the merit which results from it. You are happy in believing that, as you have consecrated your whole life to obedience for God's sake, the merit of obedience is attached not only to such actions as are performed through a

special and reflected motive of obedience, but even to everything that you do. You would not like to see the religious state deprived of this incalculable benefit; it would lose much of its attraction for you if you thought that your life was denied this meritoriousness.

Although you, happily, are sincerely attached to the religious life, and recognise the value of this sanctifying discipline, religious are to be met with whose dispositions are not as edifying as yours. Through neglecting the grace of their vocation, or falling away from observance, or disregarding the injunctions of their rule and the admonitions of their superiors, religious fall from fervour. We may therefore divide religious into three classes or parties: there is the party of destruction, in which are the disorderly or unobservant; there is the party of convenience, in which are the weak; and there is the party of observance, in which are the fervent. The party of destruction is so named because, if all religious belonged to it, there would soon be an end to the religious life. The religious who belong to it disregard all but the most essential duties of their state, and even in the matter of these they are not without fault. By much of their conduct these religious cannot but give disedification. The party of convenience is so named because the religious who form it are ready upon the slightest pretext to neglect the duties of religious observance. Their first regard seems to be for their own convenience, for relaxation, or for what will gratify their friends and admirers, and it matters little to them if for

such considerations they ignore and neglect the requirements of religious observance, and fail to give to piety and prayer the time which should be devoted to them. These religious do not give the edification which is expected of them. The party of observance comprises religious who try to live up to the spirit and letter of their rule. These good religious recognise the obligations which their holy calling imposes on them; they labour day by day for their sanctification by conforming to the requirements of conventual observance, and while faithful and zealous in fulfilling the duties with which they are charged in their communities, they take care not to deprive themselves of the many benefits afforded by the religious exercises enjoined by their rule. These religious cannot but give edification.

Of these three classes or parties, we can ascribe only to the third—to the party of observance—that zeal for discipline which brings conduct into conformity with the dictates of true wisdom. We see realized in their case what the holy writer says: 'The care of discipline is love, and love is the keeping of her laws.' They love their vocation, and they appreciate that wise discipline which the religious life imposes on those who embrace it; therefore do they, not as though under a painful restraint, but cheerfully and generously, follow the rules and observances of their institute; and their submission to religious discipline brings them happiness and peace. The more seriously you weigh these considerations, the more convinced you will become of the reality of what I have endeavoured to show, namely, that

religious who generously embrace the discipline of obedience act more conformably than others with wisdom and duty, and enjoy greater comfort and satisfaction than others. You will readily infer from this conclusion that the lives of such religious will be more meritorious and more edifying than are the lives of religious who love this discipline less, or who seemingly do not love it at all.

Having persuaded yourselves of the value of this meritorious discipline, consider how wide a range it embraces: it extends to all your duties and employments, and it claims your submission at all times; in other words, it is a holy yoke which you have taken upon you for the whole of your life.

In all your duties and employments, I say, you place yourselves under the sanctifying discipline of obedience. A religious does not select or arrange her employment; she receives from those who are placed in authority over her her instructions as to the duties to which she is to devote herself. By the same authority is regulated the hour at which the duties have to be performed, and the length of time which is to be given to their performance. It follows from this, that a religious should hold herself indifferent as to the kind of work appointed for her to do, provided that it is not contrary to the letter and spirit of the constitutions of her institute. If at times it may seem to her that her superiors do not fully utilize her talents and energy, or give sufficient scope to her zeal, she should be persuaded of the value of obedience, remembering how Samuel declared to Saul that 'obedience is better than sacri-

fices' (1 Kings xv. 22). In wise submission to the discipline of obedience, a religious should also be as willing to be in subjection as to be in authority. She should bear in mind the lessons which our Lord gave both by word and example, and should deem herself happy if required by obedience to take the lowest place. How striking is the example set by our Lord in washing the feet of His disciples! Having performed this lowly service, He said: 'If I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet' (St. John xiii. 14). He had already checked His disciples for disputing for the highest place in their number; He said on that occasion: 'If any man desire to be first, he shall be the last of all, and the minister of all' (St. Mark ix. 34).

In good religious the spirit of discipline enters into the character of their lives, it corrects and regulates their inclinations, and brings them into conformity with the true spirit of religion. I have said that you place yourselves under its influence and control in all your duties and employments; even the least important of them should therefore be regulated by religious obedience. Even in small matters, when the will of your superior has been made known to you, or where the rule is explicit, you may not say: 'I will do what I like.' In the matter, however, of neglect of the less important observances, a great deal depends upon the spirit by which you are actuated. For instance, it is one thing to neglect them because you are wanting in generosity, and quite another thing to neglect them

through disregard or contempt for your rule or your superior. It is one thing to neglect them because in themselves they seem to be of only small importance, and another thing to do so when you know that thereby you give bad example, and cause a falling-off of religious observance. These lesser observances, as I have said, come under the discipline of obedience; but you would not do wrong to omit them, when there is question of what is of greater importance, and when you have to choose between fulfilling the lesser or the greater obligation. Even then, however, you should be in the disposition to fulfil the lesser observance, if only it were possible and reasonable to do so. What should be said of the character of your obedience if you yielded it only in matters of great moment? Might it not be suspected that, if you failed in obeying in smaller matters, you would be likely to fail also in what is of more serious account? The discipline of religious obedience must hold sway over you in everything, and you would do well to apply to this matter what our Lord has said: 'He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater; and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater' (St. Luke xvi. 10). It is to be feared that if religious refuse obedience—no matter from what motive, if unjustifiable—in lesser matters, their obedience may not be counted on in greater matters.

Consider now that you must persevere in your obedience, that at no time should you withdraw yourselves from this holy discipline. Speaking of

the perfections of obedience, an author* says : ' The act of obedience should be accompanied with gladness and spiritual joy, and it should be done in humility, and with a constant and persevering spirit.' You should bring this persevering spirit to your submission to obedience generally, for in the religious life the discipline of obedience does not at any time slacken or withdraw its beneficial sway—it is continual. One of the characters of the religious state is that it is disciplinary. Does it on this account become to you wearisome or monotonous ? Do you weary of practising obedience ? Consider, I beg of you, that what is fickle and short-lived does not deserve the name of virtue. You would not hold that a man had the virtue of temperance if he was temperate only by fits and starts, or if he broke down periodically in his good resolutions to be so. You should not, therefore, consider that a religious possessed the virtue of obedience if she was obedient only according to her whim, and if she withdrew herself from under the discipline of religious obedience because it had become monotonous. Ah no ! you should only hold as truly obedient a religious who lives constantly and perseveringly under the discipline of obedience. Just as in a state or kingdom the laws continue always in force, and constitute the strength and safeguard of the kingdom and of its people, and as all loyal subjects remain constant in their obedience to these laws, so also has every religious institute its rules, and they continue to bind its

* Father Humphrey, S.J. : 'Elements of Religious Life,' p. 174.

members, and only those members are loyal who respect these rules, and at all times comply with their injunctions.

Let me here ask what religious are unhappy. It should surprise you that religious, being so richly blessed by God, and enjoying as they do the many advantages found in a community life, should be unhappy; how, then, shall we account for their unhappiness? Two explanations offer themselves. Either they are unfaithful to conscience, or they are self-willed. If a religious continues to commit deliberate faults, or if she disregards the discipline of obedience, it will certainly follow that she will be restless, discontented, and unhappy. Self-will is quite out of place in religion, consequently the incongruity of it cannot but be recognised and felt by religious who, being unwilling to correct their self-will and submit to control, constantly seek to shirk the duty of submission. Sometimes a religious is met with who would seem to wish her superior to be little else than a living sphynx. Whatever else the superior may choose to do, she must not require this religious to seek the sanction of her authority in anything, and she must not attempt to require compliance with directions emanating from herself; every necessary direction, according to this religious, already exists in the rule, or is pointed out by custom. The superior, forsooth, must bend to such direction, and fall into line. Only a weak superior would tolerate this subjection to what such a religious likes to make law; and such a system of religious discipline would be detrimental to both superior and

subject. The subject is unwilling, in the case now supposed, to feel or respect the authority of the living voice of the superior.

A religious who shirks the duty of submission, being fond of independence, will be unwilling to receive any direction as to what she has to do, and as to when and how she has to do it: and she will feel sore upon the exercise of any authority over her. Would it be surprising if a religious such as this, in whom is wanting the spirit of humble submission, were unhappy? Her self-will, so out of place, will lead her to discontent.

How often discontent is accompanied by unreasonableness! It has sometimes happened that a discontented religious has found fault with her superior for doing the very thing which she herself would do if she were in the superior's place. It has also happened—so ready is a discontented religious to criticise and find fault—that it has seemed impossible for the superior to do at any time what was right according to the views of such a religious.

I return now from this short, but perhaps not useless, digression to consider, in conclusion, some of the happy results of this discipline of obedience which is the subject of the conference.

In the first place, it forms religious to observance. Just as military discipline succeeds in making men good soldiers, so does the discipline of obedience make religious observant. This result is the work of time; if religious readily comply with the requirements of this discipline, they become after a few years so attached to observance that they would not

willingly fall away from it. They come to be ever more and more convinced of its beneficial influence in the matter of their perfection and happiness, and they regard it as an important safeguard of sanctifying grace, and of the grace of their vocation. If they experienced at first a sense of restraint in submitting to this discipline, they are thankful that they yet persevered in their submission, for it became to them in time even as a second nature.

A second result of this salutary discipline is that it accustoms religious to self-renunciation. Self-renunciation is a quality of the highest order and merit; it supposes even heroism. There are many lowly religious who by it gather rich fruit all along the way as they tread the path of a self-denying life; their virtue and their merit are known to God.

A third result of submission to the discipline of obedience is that religious come thereby to belong more entirely to God. They submit to it, not to obtain human praise or to serve any earthly gain, but for God's sake; and because, as we have seen, this discipline controls all the actions of a religious, and continues to control them during the whole of her life, it follows that, by this life of submission and obedience, religious truly and wholly give themselves to God. They in this way offer to God more than the sacrifice of praise; they offer Him the sacrifice of themselves and of their lives, and they devote themselves in all things and at all times to the fulfilment of His will. Who shall say how pleasing to God this sacrifice is, and how much He delights in those who make it? The words of the prophet to

the city of God's election may be applied to the soul of the devoted religious: 'The bridegroom shall rejoice over the bride, and thy God shall rejoice over thee' (Isa. lxii. 5).

Finally, religious who willingly and devotedly embrace this discipline of obedience give proof of virtue, and therefore inspire their superiors with confidence in them. They are as the tried, steady soldiers in an army; they are honoured, and they are counted upon by those in authority over them. Such religious render themselves efficient, as far as they are able, for service in religion, and they place themselves at the disposal of their superiors. They are not as the undisciplined, who begrudge their services, or who wish to select their employment; or as those who have done so little to make themselves efficient, or who display such unyielding opposition to reasonable demands that their superior finds a difficulty in arranging their employment. How little, alas! do such religious as these realize and fulfil the sacred obligations of their state! They have taken upon themselves a yoke to which they are unwilling to submit.

Pray, then, to God for the grace to understand the value of this holy discipline of obedience, and to submit yourselves devotedly to it. Your religious perfection depends in a great measure upon it; weigh also its bearing upon your peace of soul. As a result of your reflections, come to the resolution of ever associating yourselves in religion, not with the party of destruction or with the party of convenience—happily, let us hope, unknown in your communities—

but with the party of observance. Be not among those who throw off discipline, or who speak disparagingly of observance, or who shirk control and restraint. Be not of the number of those ungenerous religious who have an exaggerated notion of the rights of subjects, who are ever balancing the powers of the superior and the rights of the subject to see if they are strictly bound to comply with what the superior requires to be done, and who, having no relish for obedience, wish only to obey when they can be compelled to do so. Avoid being contaminated by those who have little or no respect or affection for their superior; avoid particularly being influenced by those who observe a stand-off manner with their superior. All such religious, however good in themselves or otherwise well-meaning, lack that spirit of submission and obedience which is so necessary to make life in religion both meritorious and happy. Seek rather to walk in the path of the Saints and of edifying religious, who have left you an example of dutiful submission and love of discipline, that, correcting your natural waywardness and walking in the way of true wisdom, you may enjoy its fruits. 'The wisdom of the spirit,' St. Paul says, 'is life and peace' (Rom. viii. 6). The way of discipline is, as we have seen, the way of wisdom; and of the wise man who has embraced it, and directed his life by it, it is written: 'He shall show forth the discipline he hath learned, and shall glory in the law of the covenant of the Lord' (Ecclus. xxxix. 11).

## XV.

### *INTERIOR RECOLLECTION.*

'In all thy ways think on Him, and He will direct thy steps.' —PROV. iii. 6.

YOUR soul is always, under God, your own. You may submit to your superiors the control of your exterior conduct; but, though the rule may enjoin the practice of interior virtue, no exterior power can enforce it. God judges by the interior, and the responsibility for this ever rests with yourselves. On yourselves, then, devolves the duty of regulating your interior spirit—your mind, heart, and will, your thoughts, convictions, affections, desires, determination and energy, motives and aims. How extensive a field of interior action, therefore, requires your constant attention and care! In this matter a great deal depends upon self-knowledge and self-restraint, and upon the practice of purity of intention, and a valuable aid to these is interior recollection.

In the notion of interior recollection I include the living by a spirit of faith, and striving to walk in God's presence; but I define it as that reflective action of the soul by which it regards what it is doing and its motives, also what it is about to do,

with the view of directing itself always to do what is right, and what it believes to be according to God's good pleasure. This reflective action by which the soul may be said to seek God should be accompanied by prayer, either mental or vocal, by which it from time to time addresses itself to Him. In practising interior recollection, you will therefore put to yourselves occasionally, or at fixed times, such questions as the following: What am I doing? What am I about to do? What should I now do? Are my motives what they ought to be? Am I avoiding what is faulty? Am I doing this in a way to please God? As to the prayers which will be employed, they will be according to the devotion of each one, and to the circumstance of time and place, or of occupation, existing when they are uttered. They may be acts of offering, love, praise, thanksgiving, or resignation; or they may be petitions for succour or pardon.

A clearer idea of what is understood by interior recollection will impress itself upon you as you study the benefits which result from the practice of it. We are now going to consider at some length four particular benefits. We will note how the practice of interior recollection is a preservative against sin; how it insures self-control; how it is an incentive to duty and virtue; and how it helps to union with God. If the practice yields such desirable results as these, what religious is there who will not strive to acquire it? If you fail to realize *all* the blessings experienced by holy souls who practise interior recollection, you may yet realize *some* of them. Your

efforts will bring you into closer relations with the Divine Lord to whose service you have consecrated yourselves, and will procure for you much light and encouragement. The more earnestly you strive to correspond with His designs regarding you, to serve Him from pure motives in all you do, and to follow His holy guidance, the more attached will you become to the ways of holy living, and submissive to God's good pleasure. 'In all thy ways think on Him, and He will direct thy steps.'

We have to consider, in the first place, that the practice of interior recollection is a preservative against sin. By this practice you keep a guard over your interior faculties and over your motives with a view of directing your whole conduct at all times to what is right. It would be lawful, therefore, to assert of so excellent a practice what St. Jerome says of the practice of recollecting God's presence, namely, that it 'excludes all sin,' or, according to St. Thomas, that they who are faithful to it 'would seldom or never sin.' The religious who is interiorly recollected is not like some thoughtless persons who act upon impulse, and weigh their action afterwards, nor like others who designedly endeavour not to heed the dictates of conscience. No, she is circumspect as to her exterior, noting what may influence her prejudicially, and sensitive as to her interior, noting what sentiments or inclinations are striving to move her will. Under these circumstances she is not likely to be led unawares into danger; and the prevalent disposition of her soul being one of devotedness to God, she is not likely to consent to sin.

Such are the conclusions which we arrive at, only because of her circumspection, her introspection, and her dispositions; but we have also to take into account that she uses prayer. In every difficulty or danger a religious who practises interior recollection does not fail to raise her mind, heart, and voice to God, for she recognises her own weakness and inexperience, and her need of God's protection, guidance, and help. Since God has promised to listen to the prayer of the just man, the devout and God-fearing religious will not pray in vain. 'He shall cry to Me,' God says by His prophet, 'and I will hear him: I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him, and I will glorify him' (Ps. xc. 15). Because, then, the religious raises her heart to God in earnest prayer, we feel more assured that, under exterior or interior temptation, she will be preserved from consenting to sin.

The religious who is faithful to the practice of interior recollection will adopt a wise conduct of caution. She knows that, if a man leans towards evil, he is likely before long to fall in the direction towards which he is inclined. What, therefore, is her conduct? She strives never under any circumstances to seek or take the least satisfaction in what is sinful or unworthy; and as to such lawful pleasures, amusements, or gratifications as are met with on her way through life, while availing herself of them in a thankful spirit, she takes care, in them, to direct her intention to God. If, in many things and various circumstances, she has of necessity *to follow the* WORLD, she is on her guard not to love it, or to

assimulate her ways to its ways: she follows it afar off. But when there is question, as there always should be, of *following our* LORD, as in the ways of virtue, suffering, and holiness, she follows with zest and near—as near as, with the aid of grace, she can.

Her conduct, so wisely regulated and circumspect, is very different in itself and in its results from that of an unreflecting and unspiritual religious. She is able to say with David: 'The mighty have sought after my soul, and they have not set God before their eyes; for God is my helper, and the Lord is the protector of my soul' (Ps. liii. 5, 6). She is rewarded for her determination and effort to please God at all times by being preserved by His grace, not only from grievous sin, but also from many venial faults, and from any persistence in unworthy conduct. But the thoughtless religious who neglects the practice of interior recollection, failing as she does to weigh the motives of her actions, and to guard herself against baneful exterior influences, will often be led, through surprise or her own weakness, into various faults and infidelities, into forming useless purposes, and even into doing what may disedify. The prophet Jeremias attributes to the neglect of the thought of God and of duty the scandals of which he was a witness. 'With desolation,' he says, 'is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart' (Jer. xii. 11). David, too, indignant at the wickedness of the sinner, says: 'God is not before his eyes; his ways are filthy at all times' (Ps. (Heb.) x. 5). These texts of Holy Scripture should warn religious against neglecting

the practice of interior recollection, if they wish to be preserved from sin. St. Ignatius the Martyr says: 'Remember God, and thou wilt not sin.' The practice will inspire you with confidence in time of temptation. It will then be to you what ballast is to the ship in the rough sea—it will steady you, and prevent you from being overthrown by the billows of temptation. You will see the insidious snare or the violent attack, and you will call upon God and your heavenly protectors to help you; and in your confidence you will be able to say to your Lord, with David: 'Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me' (Ps. xxii. 4). Resisting without and praying within, you will triumph over your spiritual enemies, as did Judas Machabeus and the Jews over Nicanor and his army, when 'fighting with their hands, but praying to the Lord in their hearts' (2 Mach. xv. 27), the Jews fell upon their enemies and routed them.

The practice of interior recollection, in the second place, will insure to you self-control. A man *loses self-command* when others treat him with disrespect or injustice, when untoward events come suddenly upon him, and when failure rewards his earnest efforts, and he is *only partly master* of himself, when he acts without judgment, reflection, determination, and care. In the one case he loses self-command, because of external contradictions; and in the other case he is not full master of his actions as a man, because of his own failure to use his talents, gifts, and energy. In the one case the result will likely be

that he will act unreasonably, and in the other case that he will act carelessly or imprudently. A religious who practises interior recollection will, as a rule, be saved from such faults and such results. She will naturally be affected to some extent by those affronts, contradictions, and disappointments which might cause another to lose self-command; but guarding, as she does, so well the movements of her heart and will, her habitual self-control will enable her to avoid acting unreasonably, and her devout custom of referring everything to God, and of invoking His aid, will influence her to be patient, and to have confidence in God's permissions and arrangements. Such a religious will be saved from acting carelessly and imprudently, like the man who, owing to inadvertence or indifference, is not fully master of his actions, because, unlike him, she weighs what she is doing and what she is about to do with a view of doing everything well, and according to the requirements of duty.

A religious who practises interior recollection will, as a rule, be saved from such faults as excessive dissipation, sloth, moroseness, being disheartened, spiritual fatigue or disrelish, waste of time, neglect of duty and careless performance of duty, as well as from graver faults, such as fits of anger, harshness towards others, and murmuring against God. All such faults and failings manifest insufficient self-control. Such a religious is greatly helped by preserving a sense of God's presence. 'In Him,' St. Paul told the Athenians, 'we live, and move, and are' (Acts xvii. 28). The Divine essence fills all

things, pervades every place, and is everywhere; it is about us and within us. The devout and recollected religious, besides preserving a sense of this, raises her heart to God from time to time in fervent aspirations or ejaculations of worshipful affection, or she represents to herself our Lord as regarding her, and looking for her faithful service. She is helped in these pious practices by the crucifix, the devotional pictures and statues, and the emblems of piety which she sees around her, and (when in the chapel) by the holy altar and the tabernacle. As a happy result of these practices, she becomes impregnated with piety, and she holds her interior faculties controlled by religion and virtue. Unconsciously, perhaps, but yet actually, she is fulfilling what God demanded of Abraham, and she is gradually realizing the desired benefit of it. 'Walk before Me,' God said, 'and be perfect' (Gen. xvii. 1).

We have now to consider, in the third place, that the practice of interior recollection is an incentive to duty and virtue. It will, as we have seen, prove a preservative against sin and a help to self-control, but you have entered into that state of life in which you must strive to advance your spiritual interests, and to tend ever to perfection. A religious who practises interior recollection will rectify her motives and aim at her sanctification. When God said to Abraham, 'Be perfect,' He did not require him simply to avoid what would be blameworthy, or even to see that nothing should, as to their number, be wanting in his observances; but He demanded

of Abraham a perfect service as to the matter, manner, and quality of it. He required him to endeavour, in a devout and faithful spirit, to observe perfectly all the law, and in the same acceptable spirit to comply with all God's will, to do perfectly all and every one of his actions, and to perfect himself in every virtue. David, speaking in the person of a faithful servant of God, declared: 'I have kept Thy commandments and Thy testimonies, because all my ways are in Thy sight' (Ps. cxviii. 168). He attributes his exactitude to his recollection of God's presence. What a help, then, to perfection a religious will find in walking before God and practising interior recollection! Her motive in her entire conduct will be to please God, and she knows that only what is performed in the state of grace and from a good motive will be acceptable to Him. In a spirit of devotedness to God's service she will watch over her exterior, and with attentive glance she will regard her thoughts, affections, desires, and motives, to endeavour at all times to direct them conformably with the requirements of duty, the dictates of conscience, the demands of virtue, and the good pleasure of God. This is the practical path of sanctity. Imagine, then, how consoling the results of such conduct will be in the prayers and meditations of this religious, in her reception of the Sacraments, in her assistance at Holy Mass, in the fulfilment of the duties of her charge, in her relations with her superior and with her sisters in religion, and in her recreations. What a reverence for God, what charity for her neighbour, and what self-respect,

her whole conduct will display! Do we see realized in her case what St. Paul asked God to bestow on the Ephesians, when he prayed: 'That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His Spirit with might unto the inward man'? All unseen to the eye of man, the soul of a fervent religious, sanctified by the frequent reception of the holy Sacraments, by prayer, by meritorious works, and by the practice of many virtues, grows in strength and holiness. How much the practice of interior recollection assists her to avail herself with profit of these means of sanctification! This practice, too, will lead her to a love of duty and virtue, without which there is no true holiness. This seems implied in what we read in the prophet Micheas. 'I will show thee, O man,' the prophet says, 'what is good, and what the Lord requireth of thee: Verily, to do judgment, and to love mercy, and to walk solicitous with thy God' (Mich. vi. 8).

The last benefit resulting from the practice of interior recollection which I propose for your consideration is that it helps to union with God. A religious who is faithful to this excellent and most meritorious practice not only feels herself drawn to a love of duty and of virtue, but she also desires ever to walk in the ways of piety and dutifulness. What is this if not to foster grace in her soul, to seek to please God in all she does, and to cling to Him? What is this if not to begin to enjoy in this life that union with Him, by grace, which will be continued and consummated in glory in the life to come?

This happy religious will rejoice in her service of God, and will rest, as it were, in Him with confidence. She may say with David: 'I set the Lord always in my sight, for He is at my right hand that I be not moved; therefore my heart hath been glad' (Ps. xv. 8, 9). And with David, too, she may address herself to God, saying: 'I will rejoice under the covert of Thy wings: my soul hath stuck close to Thee; Thy right hand hath received me' (Ps. lxii. 8, 9). The practice of interior recollection supposes action and prayer. Both of these have God for object. The action is that by which the soul examines itself to discover if it is doing what is right, and if its motives are pleasing to God; the prayer is that raising of its affections to God by which it consecrates its actions to Him, and begs for His mercy and grace, or offers Him its praise. This practice evidently tends to maintain and increase *sanctifying grace* in the soul, and at the same time draws upon the soul the tender regard of God, who will not refuse it the *actual graces* which it needs. Thus is promoted that union of the soul with God which is the work of grace. 'He,' says St. Paul, 'who is joined to the Lord is one spirit' (1 Cor. vi. 17).

This union with God by grace, fostered and promoted by the practice of interior recollection, will make the religious solid in virtue, energetic in good works, faithful in duty, patient in suffering, and strong when under temptation. It will also inspire her with all the consolation afforded by Christian hope. St. Ephrem says: 'Always remember God,

and your mind will mount to heaven.' Not only does the devout religious remember God, but her whole life is devoted to Him. If at times she commits some fault, she does not delay to repent of it, and to make amends by renewed and more earnest fidelity.

Of how much those religious deprive themselves who neglect interior recollection, and who therefore take but little pains to offer God a fervent and devoted service! St. Teresa declares that when she neglected to guard herself against a dissipated mind, as happened when she gave too much time to receiving visits, she 'neither enjoyed the sweetness of God nor the satisfactions of the world.' Is not this also the experience of religious who fail to act with a spirit of faith, and from the motive of pleasing God in all they do, who do not reflect upon God's presence, and who seldom raise their hearts in prayer, except when at the devotional exercises of the community? God measures out His consolations according to the devotedness of His servants; but what stimulus to, or preservative of, devotedness does a religious employ who neglects interior recollection? God helps and defends those who 'watch and pray'; but this religious is uncircumspect and unguarded, and, as we have said, she has not the habit of prayer. She is determined ever to live in God's grace, but she is not earnest and constant in employing the means by which grace is gained and fostered. She will therefore be weak and faulty, and she will not experience that relish for holy living which is felt by the religious who is drawn effectively

towards virtue and union with God by the practice of interior recollection. St. Paul says: 'See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly; not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil' (Eph. v. 15. 16). If you have not walked circumspectly, if you have not valued as you ought this excellent help to your sanctification, be more earnest about it in the future, redeeming the time. 'Wherefore,' the Apostle goes on to say, 'become not unwise, but understanding what is the will of God' (Eph. v. 17). He exhorts you not to act unwisely, but to examine your conduct at all times, to see if you are doing God's good pleasure. 'In all thy ways think on Him, and He will direct thy steps.'

Examples of the practice of interior recollection are furnished by the Holy Scriptures. Thus, we read how Henoch 'walked with God' (Gen. v. 22); how Noe 'found grace before the Lord,' how he 'was a just and perfect man in his generation,' and walked with God' (Gen. vi. 8, 9); how the Lord was with Joseph, and how Joseph kept God in his sight (Gen. xxxix. 21); how Tobias, who was always observant, taught his son to be so also (Tob. i. 10), and how he said to him: 'All the days of thy life have God in thy mind' (iv. 6). There are also many other examples, as of Susanna (Dan. xiii. 23), and Eleazar (2 Mach. vi. 23); but the most impressive lessons are met with in the Psalms of David and in Ecclesiasticus. The lives of the Saints of every age of the Church furnish you with instructive examples, and we find in the writings of St. Augustine,

St. Bernard, St. Francis of Sales, and other Saints, and in the 'Imitation of Christ' and other spiritual books, earnest exhortations to the practice of recollection.

In conclusion, let me say that you should form a habit of this practice; but there are times when you should make a point of collecting your thoughts and directing your actions. These particular times are the beginning and close of every day, the beginning of your spiritual exercises and of your principal duties, and when you make your examination of conscience. David says in one place: 'O Lord, in the morning Thou shalt hear my voice; in the morning I will stand before Thee, and will see' (Ps. v. 4, 5). And in another place: 'My eyes are ever towards the Lord' (Ps. xxiv. 15). The Holy Ghost has told us by the lips of Zachary that our Lord came into the world to overcome our enemies and to bring us the blessings of peace, that 'we may serve Him without fear, in holiness and justice before Him all our days' (St. Luke i. 74, 75). Every day, therefore, you should recollect yourselves and direct your lives, which are in a special manner consecrated to God, to the faithful and fervent fulfilment of the service which you owe Him. 'Blessed,' says Ecclesiasticus, 'is the man that shall continue in wisdom, and that shall meditate in his justice, and in his mind shall think of the all-seeing eye of God' (xiv. 22). Persevere in the practice of interior recollection, and you will persevere in the path of a devout and meritorious religious life. You will not waste your energies in useless pursuits, nor will you be led

captive by vicious inclinations; but you will treasure up your strength and expend it wisely and profitably in accomplishing the various duties of your state, and you will love the ways of piety and virtue. 'They that fear the Lord,' says the holy writer, 'keep His commandments, . . . and in His sight will sanctify their souls' (Ecclus. ii. 20, 21).

Be not, then, of the number of those unspiritual religious who run after exterior satisfactions, who disregard observance, or who disedify by unseemly conduct; but beg of God to bestow upon you a sincere love of duty, piety, and religious virtue. Zealous for your highest interests, pray that you may be ever guided by a desire of pleasing Him, ever regulate conscientiously your exterior occupations, and ever fulfil in a spirit of loyalty and fervour the prescriptions of your holy rules. To this prayer join greater assiduity in the practice of interior recollection. God will bless you in your efforts, and you will experience the consoling results of this valuable help to your peace, merit, and sanctification. 'In all thy ways think on Him, and He will direct thy steps.'

## XVI.

### *JUDGMENT.*

'We must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ.'—2 Cor. v. 10.

Day by day, as good religious, you sit in judgment on yourselves; and day by day you are drawing nearer to the time when you must pass to be judged in the supreme court of the Eternal Judge. You should, until you reach that court, judge yourselves constantly, and prepare yourselves for the final and irrevocable sentence which will there be pronounced. After the sentence of that court there will be no further matter to come under judgment.

When you pass judgment on yourself, you are both witness and judge; your conscience bears testimony, and also decides as to the goodness or malice of your conduct. At the supreme judgment-seat the eye of God will testify as to your life, and His justice will pass judgment. You are not like that sinner of whom the holy writer says: 'He knoweth not that the eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts' (Ecclus. xxiii. 28). You know that God sees all

things, and it is your desire to judge of your own conduct as it is in His eyes. You believe that to deceive yourself as to it would be foolish and disastrous. God foretells by the mouth of Solomon the evil which will overtake the sinner who does not heed God's judgment, and who foolishly cloaks his own malice by self-deception. 'The Lord beholdeth,' says Solomon, 'the ways of man, and considereth all his steps. His own iniquities catch the wicked. . . . He shall die, because he hath not received instruction, and in the multitude of his folly he shall be deceived' (Prov. v. 21-23). Moreover, you desire that your conduct may be such as to meet with a favourable judgment before God and your own conscience in this world, so that you may receive at the judgment to come the sentence, not of death, but of life.

It should be profitable to you to consider during the retreat the subject of the particular judgment. What subject could be more suitable to make you alive to your responsibility towards God, and candid with yourselves, and to lead you to rectify whatever in your conduct would be likely to draw upon yourselves an unfavourable judgment?

Convince yourselves, in the first place, that at death you will have to submit yourselves to a full and most just judgment upon your lives. Your soul, the time accorded to you on earth, your talents, gifts and possessions are committed to your care in this life as the stewards of God. At death God will call you, as though saying to you: 'Give an account of thy stewardship, for now thou canst be steward no longer' (St. Luke xvi. 2). 'After a long time,' says

the parable, 'the lord of those servants came, and reckoned with them' (St. Matt. xxv. 19). None can possibly escape this reckoning. God cannot be unjust to Himself, nor can He be a neglectful lord; therefore must He see how His gifts have been used, and must reckon with His servants. All His gifts are of value in His eyes, and all must be turned to profit. To all of you He has said: 'Trade till I come' (St. Luke xix. 13). Come He will, and then He will 'command His servants to be called,' for, as St. Paul says: 'We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ' (Rom. xiv. 10). When you will be called, there will be no delay in the holding of the reckoning; the call is that of death, and the reckoning that of judgment. St. Paul says: 'It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment' (Heb. ix. 27); and in Ecclesiasticus we read: 'It is easy before God in the day of death to reward every one according to his ways' (xi. 28). According to this teaching, there is at death a particular judgment to be undergone; until that time God will not hold His reckoning with you—the time of trading must be at an end before the gains or losses are counted. Sometimes, as when you hear of grave scandals, or of grievous wrong inflicted, you are inclined to say: 'Why does God tolerate this?' He tolerates it because the time of His reckoning has not yet arrived. Sometimes, too, the sinner is emboldened when he finds that no punishment falls upon him; he seems to make no account of God's judgment; but how great is his folly! What do the Scriptures bid him consider? 'Say not: I have sinned, and

what harm hath befallen me? for the Most High is a patient rewarder' (Ecclus. v. 4). God has His own time for dealing with the sinner; it may be put off, but it will most surely come.

Convince yourselves, therefore, that God in His justice will at death bring you to judgment. While you are on your way, He deigns to favour you with many helps towards your preparation: such helps are the light given to your conscience, the sense of rectitude impressed on your heart, the shame and remorse which follow sin, and the misery which attends the delay of repentance. He leaves open to you now the way of mercy and of merit, of sanctification and of voluntary satisfaction; and He bestows upon you, through many channels, the blessings of His grace. Now is the time to turn these helps and blessings to good account; it will expire at death, when, as Solomon says, 'All things that are done God will bring into judgment' (Eccles. xii. 14).

It may be well to ask more particularly what matters will come under God's judgment at your death. He will judge every moral act whether interior or exterior, and every culpable omission of duty. The prophet Jeremias says that God judges justly, and tries the reins and the heart (Jer. xi. 20). To Samuel God said: 'Nor do I judge according to the look of man . . . the Lord beholdeth the heart' (1 Kings xvi. 7). It should not surprise you that God will judge your heart, because the first and greatest of the commandments is that you should love Him with your whole heart; and because, as our Lord has said, every kind of wickedness pro-

ceeds from the heart (St. Mark vii. 21). Then will be seen what have been your affections, motives, and desires. He will also judge all wicked thoughts and all rash and unjust judgments. St. Bernard says: 'What will God do concerning unjust judgments, seeing that He will even judge justices?' (Ep. i.). Our Lord tells us that, moreover, our words shall be judged: 'I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned' (St. Matt. xii. 36, 37). God will also judge men's actions. He tells us by His prophet how He has therefore warned men: 'I said to the wicked: Do not act wickedly' (Ps. lxxiv. 5). And our Lord has said that 'they that have done evil shall come forth unto the resurrection of judgment' (St. John v. 29). You will also have to answer for the use which you have made of the instructive lessons contained in our Lord's doctrine, which happily you prize so much; for our Lord has said: 'He that despiseth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day' (St. John xii. 48). You will have to account for the profit to which you have turned the lessons, exhortations, and warnings found in His teaching.

Finally, your judgment will be according to the liberality of God in His gifts to you during life. You remember how, in the parable, the lord gave to some servants five talents, and to others two, and how account was taken accordingly at the rendering of

the talents ; so will it be in your case also, according to our Lord's words : ' Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required : and to whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more ' (St. Luke xii. 48).

The matter for judgment will therefore be your thoughts, words, deeds, motives and affections ; the use you have made of the gifts of nature and of grace, and your failure to use these gifts according to God's designs in bestowing them ; also all culpable omissions and negligences in fulfilling the moral law. Then will be seen how you have lived in regard of your vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience ; what your charity has been for your sisters, and what your respect for your superiors. Then shall you answer for faults of anger, sensuality, pride and sloth ; for disedification given in your community ; and for any injury which your conduct may have caused to religion. Then, too, will be examined how you have prayed and how you have laboured.

Not only, however, will your faults be exposed in all their details, but happily, at the judgment-seat, all your meritorious actions will also be brought to light. The inquiry will not be one-sided ; for then, too, shall be seen your devotedness to duty, your humility, patience, charity, self-denial, piety, obedience, modesty, and all your other virtues, and all your good works. Nothing that you have ever done for God will be lost sight of. Thus at the judgment shall be verified the words of Solomon : ' God shall judge both the just and the wicked, and then shall be the time of every thing ' (Eccles. iii. 17).

Consider, in the next place, the manner of God's judgment. We say now in our ignorance: 'How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!' (Rom. xi. 33); but when we shall appear before the judgment-seat, then shall we see in clearer light the wisdom, goodness, mercy and justice displayed by God in all His dealings with us. Then, too, will God weigh and measure with unerring justice everything concerning us, and pass upon us sentence accordingly. 'We must all,' St. Paul says, 'be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive . . . according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil.' 'And if I do judge,' our Lord has declared, 'My judgment is true' (St. John viii. 16). No matter what may be exposed before Him, it will be impossible for Him to be deceived, or to be perplexed as to the sentence which He should pass. 'As I hear,' He says, 'so I judge: and My judgment is just' (St. John v. 30). So impartially just will be His judgment that He will show no respect of persons. In the old dispensation Moses commanded the judges of the people, saying: 'There shall be no difference of persons, you shall hear the little as well as the great: neither shall you respect any man's person, because it is the judgment of God' (Deut. i. 17); by which words we are told that at the Divine tribunal there is perfect impartiality. 'Thou art just, O Lord,' says David, 'and Thy judgment is right' (Ps. cxviii. 137).

The Divine Judge will be incorruptible; no pleading and no gifts will be able to alter His just judgment. You will stand before Him with your merits

and demerits, and at that tribunal even the voices of your heavenly pleaders may not be raised in your behalf. No power will be able to stay the course of full justice. 'If you offer me,' God says, 'holocausts and your gifts, I will not receive them . . . and I will not hear the canticles of thy harp; but judgment shall be revealed as water, and justice as a mighty torrent' (Amos v. 22-24). In His justice, therefore, God will be on that day of absolute justice immovable and inexorable. 'I am the Lord,' He says, 'and I change not' (Mal. iii. 6).

It should not surprise you, when you reflect upon what we have been considering concerning the judgment, that even the just have been inspired with fear at the thought of it. This fear is beneficial. You will do well, therefore, to dwell upon this subject, if only that you may learn to fear God's reckoning with you at your death. Do not reckon without Him during life, that you may not have reason to fear His reckoning with you at death. Now, and not when it will be too late, is the time to act under the inspiration of this salutary fear. Now is the time to pray with David: 'Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear, for I am afraid of Thy judgments' (Ps. cxviii. 120).

You have reason to fear the judgment, because you have sinned. If sin only disturbed for a time your peace of mind, or even the social order around you, or if it only caused some passing pain, loss, or shame to yourselves or others, it would be a great evil; but you have to remember that it has a further effect—it offends God, the supreme, infinite, and

eternal Being. You have also to remember that God in His justice must pass judgment upon the sinner, and measure out the punishment which he deserves on account of his sin; and that God's punishments are not as those slight chastisements which meet the justice of the case as between man and man—that is, when it is a man who offends, and a man who is offended. God's punishments have to meet the justice of the case as between man and his God: for it is man who sins, and God who is outraged by his sin. We have no standard by which we may gauge what these punishments will be, but we know that they must be very great. We read in the Book of Proverbs: 'Who can say, My heart is clean, I am pure from sin?' (xx. 9). Even the just do not deem themselves free from all sin; and we read of Saints who held themselves to be the basest of sinners. You have reason, then, to fear the particular judgment, seeing that, if you die with sin not satisfied for, justice will demand your punishment. 'I feared all my works,' Job said, 'knowing that Thou didst not spare the offender' (Job ix. 28). 'What shall I do when God shall rise to judge? and when He shall examine, what shall I answer Him?' (Job xxxi. 14). You fear the ordeal of judgment, because of the misgiving which will alarm your soul until the pronouncement of your sentence—a sentence which you know will be irrevocable. You will be pronounced either saved or lost; and even if saved, you may have to suffer for a time (1 Cor. iii. 15), for you may have died still owing something to the Divine justice.

There is evidently reason for you to fear the judgment-seat to which you will be summoned at death; yet you should not deny yourselves whatever consolation you may hope to experience at that tribunal. In some things you may perhaps have judged yourselves too severely; the eye of Divine justice may detect that you were not fully aware of the malice of what you were doing; or there may not have been on your part full consent to it. There may, also, at times have been more of frailty than of malice in your faults than you put to your account. You may at your judgment learn that in many cases, through compunction and fervour, you had soon been freed from the guilt of your venial sins: and that, by your patience under trials, your voluntary penances, the indulgences you gained, your repeated acts of contrition, your pious reception of the Sacraments, and your earnest devotedness to God's service, you had also expiated the punishment due to those sins. I offer these considerations to devout, conscientious religious. You may also console yourselves with the thought that though God will be inexorable at the judgment-seat, He is not so during your life-time; on the contrary, He is lavish in His mercy. You may therefore hope that, if you strive ever to act conscientiously, there will be little left for His justice to deal with. How this thought should instigate you to devotedness in God's service during your time of trial in this world! God may also Himself fill you with a holy confidence, so that when you draw near to your end, you may be able to say in the words of David: 'In peace in the self-same I will

sleep, and I will rest ; for Thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope' (Ps. iv. 9, 10).

Moreover, although you should not be without fear, you may yet take comfort from the thought that wherever we find in the Holy Writings threats of terrible evils, they are addressed to the wicked. Undoubtedly, as we have already seen, the just as well as the wicked will be judged; but certainly the ordeal will not be equally terrible in the case of both. There will be much to console the just, and nothing for the sinner but dread and despair. You may also take comfort, if you are devout religious, from the thought that you do more good than evil ; for all your days are consecrated to God's service, and your notable faults are only occasional. Consider, too, that in your faults the malice, great as it may be, is all your own—it is human ; but in your good works, which are the set-off against your faults, there is something supereminently valuable which renders them highly meritorious—they are the fruit of Divine grace. Your good works are done in charity, and are clothed with the merits of Jesus Christ. Take comfort, then—while dreading what may stand against you—from such considerations as these, and finally from the thought that you are the friends of God, and that His condemnation and the terrors of His eternal justice are for His enemies.

It now only remains for you to ask yourselves what it behoves you to do, so that you may look forward with confidence to the result of the ordeal of your judgment. You should ever bear in mind that you most certainly will be judged by God after

your death. The holy writer represents the dead as saying to the living: 'Remember my judgment; for thine also shall be so: yesterday for me, and to-day for thee' (Ecclus. xxxviii. 23).

You will not make a good preparation for the ordeal if you do not judge yourselves now. Look well into your hearts and examine your conduct while there is yet time to correct what is faulty, and to atone for your sins and negligences by sincere conversion, compunction, and amendment. Now is the time to seek God's mercy and to appease His anger. Like the penitents who gathered round St. John the Baptist and listened to his exhortations to penance, you, too, may 'flee from the wrath to come' (St. Luke iii. 7). Your sins may not be as grievous as theirs, but you must deal promptly and thoroughly with them. Be not like those religious who never take a serious account of their faults and negligences, or of their unsatisfactory dispositions, or like those who examine themselves superficially. Such as these will leave a great deal of matter for judgment by God, whereas religious who deal unsparingly with their failings will save themselves from the confusion of such judgment, for St. Paul says: 'If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged' (1 Cor. xi. 31). 'Woe to them,' we read in Ecclesiasticus, 'that have lost patience, and that have forsaken the right ways. . . . What will they do, when the Lord shall begin to examine?' The holy writer evidently hints at their confusion under the ordeal, and he goes on to contrast their conduct with that of the pious. As to these, he says: 'They that fear the Lord will prepare their hearts,

and in His sight will sanctify their souls' (Ecclus. ii. 16-20). This is the wise conduct which the thought of the judgment should lead you to adopt.

You will prepare your hearts by keeping a good account with your conscience, by striving at all times to do good and to avoid evil. St. John says: 'If our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God' (1 St. John iii. 21). If, therefore, you strive ever to follow the dictates of an enlightened conscience, you will keep your accounts in order. Be careful in examining your conscience, be sincere in regretting your faults, and be earnest in correcting your failings. Let your conduct towards your neighbour be guided by our Lord's teaching. Do not most of your faults arise from want of charity, patience, or respect in your conduct towards your neighbour? 'Be ye merciful,' our Lord says, 'as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given to you' (St. Luke vi. 36-38). St. James tells us that mercy shall, as it were, close the books of judgment, where he says: 'Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy; and mercy exalteth itself above judgment' (St. James ii. 13). The more earnestly and perseveringly you strive to do good, the more readily will your heart repel temptations to evil, and the greater will your effort be to correct your negligence and your infidelities; and eventually goodness will, under the influence of grace, become as a second nature.

You will not make a proper preparation for the

ordeal of judgment if you do not now settle the affairs of your conscience. Leave nothing indefinitely unsettled if there should be any matter of the past or present which causes uneasiness of conscience. How sad is the case of a religious who has just reason for misgiving about any past fault or present conduct, and who defers taking action with a view to be relieved from so painful a misgiving! To her, as to a sinner who delays his conversion, the message comes: 'Defer it not from day to day' (Ecclus. v. 8). What should cause a religious misgiving in her present conduct would be a sense that she is not endeavouring to correct her predominant failing, or that she is not striving to be dutiful.

If, happily, you are the servants of God, desirous only of pleasing Him in all your works, I exhort you to hold your souls balanced between apprehension and confidence. We read how the aged Tobias addressed himself with confidence to God, but not without sighs which betokened his sense of his unworthiness. 'He began,' we read, 'to pray with tears, saying: Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are just, and all Thy ways mercy, and truth, and judgment; and now, O Lord, think of me, and take not revenge of my sins' (Tob. iii. 1-3). If, as he did, you judge yourselves now, and deplore now your transgressions, and strive always to walk in the path of duty, virtue, piety, and observance, you may count upon experiencing now in your lifetime the abundance of God's mercy and goodness, and this will fill you with a holy and humble confidence when the thought of God's dread judgment

occurs to you. Take to yourselves our Lord's exhortation, an instructive message to you in what way to direct your present and future conduct: 'Watch ye, therefore,' He says, 'praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of man' (St. Luke xxi. 36). While on your guard against danger, have a zeal for spiritual goods (1 Cor. xiv. 1), and keep your heart constantly raised with unshaken confidence to God, who, as St. Paul says, 'will render to every man according to his works; to them, indeed, who, according to patience in good work, seek glory, and honour, and incorruption, eternal life' (Rom. ii. 6, 7).

## SIXTH DAY.

### XVII.

*CONFORMITY WITH THE DIVINE WILL.*

'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'—ST. MATT. vi 10.

A MAN learns by his own reason and experience that he cannot find entire satisfaction in having his own way, and that therefore his happiness has not been made to depend on following his own will. His experience is that often his will is thwarted by others, that often he himself changes his own mind and becomes dissatisfied with what he had just taken pleasure in, and that often his own better nature condemns as foolish or wicked what he has set his heart upon doing. In some men their will is weak or fickle, and in others it is cruel or base. If man cannot find happiness in following absolutely his own will, whose will must he follow in order to secure it? Is there any will supremely perfect and reliable which he may follow, and so find happiness, and which he may make the absolute law of his own will? Yes, and there is only, and can only be, one such will; it is the adorable will of God—a will that is infinitely

and unalterably perfect, and the law of all perfection. When God commands, man must obey; but when He makes known His will only as counselling or persuading, He does not intend in such a case to impose upon man the obligation of obedience. In some cases God's counsels are not addressed to all men; thus, our Lord said upon an occasion: 'All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given' (St. Matt. xix. 11).

You wish, with a view to your perfection, and to your happiness here and your reward hereafter, to bring your fickle will into conformity with the Divine will. Therefore do you say from your heart in the Lord's Prayer: 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' You wish by this holy conformity to honour God in a manner in which He necessarily wishes to be honoured; for He wishes, and must wish, all His creatures to do His will.

Let us consider, first of all, what in a general way is understood by conformity with the Divine will; we will then consider more particularly what man's attitude in relation to the Divine will should be in the case of God's commands, of the blessings which He sends, and of the afflictions which He permits; and finally we will consider some of the happy results of conformity with His will.

In the first place, when we say that we wish to conform ourselves to the Divine will, it must be evident to us that we should wish to do this in a perfect manner and without reserve; but there is such a thing as imperfect conformity. Imperfect conformity in a case when God does not enjoin or

command anything, but only counsels or invites us to do a certain thing, would not necessarily be sinful, or a formal opposition to God's will, but would exhibit on our part a want of correspondence which would be an imperfection. We suppose in the case of this imperfect conformity, or non-conformity, that if God were to command the particular thing, instead of only counselling it, we would be willing to obey. Perfect conformity would be so entirely to abandon ourselves to all God's commands, arrangements, and permissions, as to wish that He would do with us in everything, and at all times, as He pleases. In this perfect abandonment to the Divine will we would withhold nothing, either as to body or soul, life or death, time or eternity; it would involve our compliance and conformity with the Divine will in suffering as well as in doing all that God may require of us.

This abandonment to the Divine will would not be perfect unless in all God's arrangements—not only as regards ourselves, but also as regards others—we yielded interior acquiescence and approval, believing that in all things God acts for the best. It supposes, also, that we fulfil God's commands promptly, readily, and completely; and that in suffering we meet our trials with resignation and without murmuring, and even with thanksgiving for God's most excellent designs in permitting them.

Such is the meaning of perfect conformity with the Divine will; and this is what we actually pray for when we ask of God the grace to do His will on earth as the Angels accomplish it in heaven. In

heaven the Angels, with joy and praise, fulfil most promptly and most completely all God's good pleasure. 'Bless the Lord,' says the psalmist, 'all ye His hosts, you ministers of His that do His will' (Ps. cii. 21).

There is nothing unreasonable in this perfect conformity, for there cannot be anything unreasonable in what God deigns to ask of us, His will being itself the eternal law of all rectitude, and always necessarily in complete accordance with right reason. Besides, nothing is desirable in itself, as the first and utmost object of our desire, except God, and therefore to conform ourselves to what God wills should be the first and most desirable object of our will. For in what light do we regard God, whose will we wish to make our own? We know by faith that He is infinite in wisdom, goodness, mercy and love, and that He is eternal and unchangeable. In ourselves, however, we recognise ignorance, vice, weakness, and fickleness; and we acknowledge our complete dependence on God. We cannot, then, but see that the more perfectly we conform ourselves with God's will, the nearer we approach to the perfection of wisdom and rectitude, and on this account devotedness to the Divine will must be looked upon as the surest sign of virtue. It is also the first effect of true conversion; for, as the sinner's crime was his opposition to God's law, he should manifest his repentance by renewed obedience to it. Thus, we read how St. Paul, immediately upon his conversion, addressed himself to our Lord, saying: 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' (Acts ix. 6)—as though

saying: 'Lord, I have resisted Thy will, but now I desire only what Thou willest.' Devotedness to the Divine will is also the best test of love. There can be no settled and durable union of hearts where there is no union of wills. God will not accept the love of those who oppose His will, because it is wanting in the very first element of true love, namely, devotedness. 'We cannot,' says St. Augustine (in Ps.), 'offer to God anything which will be more pleasing to Him than to say to Him what is said in Isaias: Take possession of us. God has possession of us when His will is our supreme and only law, so that we desire only to do what is pleasing to Him.'

We have to consider more particularly, in the second place, what man's attitude in relation to the Divine will should be in the case of God's commands, of the blessings which He sends, and of the afflictions which He permits.

Our conformity with the Divine will must be displayed, first, in obeying God's commands. In the case of the commandments God signifies His will in an imperative way; and in such a case obedience must be, not optional, but absolute. We have to inquire, not if we must necessarily obey, for our duty to do so is clear, but only what does God require us to do, or forbid us to do. Our duty also is to wish to do what God commands; our compliance with the command must be complete; our will must conform to the will of God. We owe to God this homage of submission to His will, for He is our Sovereign Lord. We must also believe that what is commanded is absolutely right, and that our

obedience, too, is right. The obligation of this perfect compliance is conveyed in our Lord's words: 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments' (St. Matt. xix. 17); and David says: 'Thou hast commanded Thy commandments to be kept most diligently' (Ps. cxviii. 4). I will not dwell upon the necessity and benefit of loving God's law, and of obeying it, for nothing would give you greater pain than to be guilty of any conduct which would show disregard for the commandments. You may, happily, be able to say with the young man mentioned in the Gospel: 'All these have I kept from my youth' (St. Matt. xix. 20). If in some particulars your compliance has not been dutiful, you have repented of your faults, and you remember them with sentiments of sincere regret.

I need not dwell upon what is our duty to God's will, when it pleases God to lavish His favours and blessings upon us. At no time are we excluded from the benefits of His watchful and loving providence, and our hands are full of His gifts. How many natural and supernatural agencies are at work to provide amply for all the needs of our soul and body! how often God answers our special prayers! and how often, all unasked, He confers precious favours! In all this we see the Divine will displaying its goodness towards us, in a manner which we can readily appreciate. We may exclaim in praise and gratitude, using the words of the prophet Baruch: 'Thou hast dealt with us, O Lord our God, according to all Thy goodness, and according to all that great mercy of Thine' (Bar. ii. 27). In view of these

loving manifestations of the Divine will, it is our duty to rejoice in experiencing God's favour, to praise God at all times, and to show our gratitude in every way we can.

I pass on now to consider what our conformity with the Divine will should be in the various trials and afflictions which God permits to befall us. Using the Divine prerogative of His power and supreme dominion, God could always stay the hand, or bring to naught the machinations of those who intend to injure us; but He nevertheless in many cases does not interpose, and the injury is done to us. We confess, then, that the affliction comes upon us by His permission.

In such cases it is lawful for us to try, before the wrong is done to us, or before the affliction—in which there may be no wrong on the part of others—befalls us, to avert the injury or suffering. God was not displeased with Abraham when he prayed that Sodom might be spared, nor with the Ninevites when by their penances they sought to avert the destruction of their city. Nor will He be displeased with us if we try to avert a calamity which threatens us.

How, let us now ask, should we be disposed towards the Divine will when the trial or affliction has befallen us? If we believe that God has permitted and sent it as a manifestation of His wrath, and for our just punishment—as was the case when He sometimes permitted the defeat in battle of His own chosen people—then we are bound to submit ourselves in mind and will absolutely to God's ap-

pointment. We should therefore bear the scourge justly inflicted with patient submission, and it would show opposition to the Divine will if we were to murmur or complain under it.

In other cases, when we consider that the afflictions which have befallen us are meant only as trials, then, while conforming our will to God's, inasmuch as we believe that everything which He wills is right, we are yet not held to have been obliged to wish the affliction for ourselves, or to love it in itself. Because we were not willing that it should befall us, we did not thereby display an absolute will on our part opposed to what God willed to permit, but only a wish, in which explicitly or implicitly was included a readiness to embrace whatever God might will. I may explain our attitude and disposition in this way: we seemed to say, 'I do not wish this to happen, but, if God so wills, let it happen.' It would, however, have been more meritorious, and would have manifested more perfect conformity with the Divine will, if from the first—by reason of our trust in God, and our belief that He does everything for the best—we had desired and prayed only that the will of God might be done. We should strive to impress upon our minds at all times the truth that God's will is most holy and most equitable; and we should be devoted to it as well in adversity as in prosperity.

These considerations should lead us to strive to conform ourselves to the Divine will in unjust reproach, unmerited persecution, sickness, suffering, loss, anxiety, want, sorrow, and every other form of

trial. How often God turns our sorrow into joy, and how wisely He ordains everything! The last, our Lord tells us, shall be first, and the humble shall be exalted; how different are God's ways and arrangements from those which human polity would suggest! When Joseph, who had been sold as a slave, was the ruler of Egypt, second in authority only to Pharaoh, he said to his brethren, who had sold him, but who eventually became suppliants seeking at his hands the necessaries of life: 'Fear not: can we resist the will of God? You thought evil against me, but God turned it into good, that He might exalt me' (Gen. l. 19, 20). How often fond parents have found it hard to part with their children when God has called them to the religious state; but how happy they were afterwards when they saw what good these children did, and what peace they enjoyed; while in the case of their other children, whom they settled in life according to their own wishes, they have suffered sorrow and shame. Strive ever to imitate those who desire only what God wills, and who therefore, saying, 'God's will be done,' readily clasp the cross which, in the form of some interior or exterior trial, God sends them. Remember that our Lord teaches us to pray that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. In heaven the blessed, purely from love, and for the glory of God, do with promptitude, constancy, and perseverance all that He wills.

How edifying an example of this perfect conformity to God's will we see in the conduct of Job! What did this holy man say when he had been re-

duced, by God's permission, to the very extreme of human misery? Reproving the impatience of his wife, and rejecting her advice to turn against God, he said: 'If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?' (Job ii. 10). A rich blessing is hidden under all the afflictions which befall us; for, as a devout writer says, the chastisements of God humble and purify the soul, confound our pride, and dissipate all vainglory ('The Valley of Lilies'). For this reason we should strive to bring ourselves as perfectly as possible into conformity with the Divine will which permits them.

When our Blessed Lady said to the Angel, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word,' she made an act of the most perfect conformity with the Divine will. She embraced with her will whatever might follow from her submission to the Divine decrees concerning her. We have studied her life, we have seen her sorrows and her anguish, we call her the Co-redemptrix of the world, and we know that to bear that title her sufferings must have been, as far as could be, very like those of her Divine Son. See, then, what she accepted when she pronounced those words. Those words proclaimed her holiness.

Our highest model of conformity with the Divine will is our Lord. The will to which He submitted, and which He embraced, is that very same Divine will which ordains everything that happens to us, and the will to which we are asked to conform ourselves at all times. St. Paul, quoting from one of

the psalms, tells us that our Lord's coming to sacrifice Himself was, above all other ends, to be an act of conformity with the Divine will: 'In the head of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy will, O God' (Heb. x. 7). His mission was to devote Himself to this will, as He Himself gives us to understand by what fell from His sacred lips on various occasions. Thus, we hear Him say at one time: 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, that I may perfect His work;' at another time: 'I seek not My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me'; and again: 'I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me' (St. John iv. 34; v. 30; vi. 38). We learn from His prayer in the garden, when His most bitter Passion presented itself to Him as a chalice which He had to drink to the dregs, how perfect was His conformity with the Divine will. He did not reject the chalice, but wished only to submit Himself to His Father's will in accepting it. 'Father,' He said, 'if Thou wilt, remove this chalice from Me; but yet not My will, but Thine be done' (St. Luke xxii. 42). He teaches us His last lesson from the Cross—it is one of conformity. He tells us that He has now accomplished the work which His Father gave Him to perfect. The lesson is handed down to us by St. John in brief but impressive words. He tells us that Jesus said: 'It is consummated; and bowing His head, He gave up the ghost' (St. John xix. 30). From what we have thus gathered from the record of our Lord's life given to us in the holy Gospels, we learn that from

beginning to end it was one of conformity with the Divine will.

What, then, shall we hold of more importance to us than to devote ourselves to it? What prayer should be oftener in our hearts and on our lips than 'God's will be done'? Who should be more devoted to the accomplishment of the Divine will than religious? Are they not enrolled by a sacred profession as the servants of God? and do they not place before themselves in an especial manner for their imitation the life and virtues of Jesus Christ?

The importance of devoting ourselves to the accomplishment of the Divine will is seen also in this, that it is really the matter upon which we shall be judged. What will judgment be, if not an examination into our observance of God's law and our compliance with His will? If God has been our Master, we shall look to Him for our reward; but if we have subjected ourselves to other masters, God will reject us at the judgment. We may therefore say that our only security, and our only source of confidence, should be in our perfect conformity with the Divine will. The more complete and devoted our conformity is, the greater will be our merit in the sight of God, and consequently the more abundant our reward.

Other results of our conformity will be the correction of our faults, and the acquisition of equanimity and peace, and of favour with God.

If we seek only to accomplish God's will, and if we dutifully submit to all the Divine appointments, it will be our effort to correct in ourselves all that is

displeasing to the eye of God; for what the will of God demands is our sanctification (1 Thess. iv. 3) and our perfection, according to the measure of the grace decreed to us. It will be in an especial way our endeavour to correct our self-will, and all waywardness which would lead us from the path of present duty, and to desire from our heart to do what is pleasing to God. Our sense of dutifulness towards God's will will prove a corrective of inquietude, impatience, dissatisfaction, and inordinate grief, when troubles and contradictions occur.

This spirit of conformity will therefore bring us an even mind, a contentedness with our lot, and with the issue of our undertakings after we have made all lawful efforts for their success. This spirit does not generate weakness of character or inaction, for conformably with the Divine will we will always use the talents and opportunities given us, to help our purposes and further our works, and we will offer up fervent prayers for their success, and leave nothing undone which we may deem lawful and useful to realize it; but our first and chief desire will always be that God's will may be done. When we have done our best, we will with an even mind leave the issue to God.

This spirit of conformity will give us peace, not only because of our equanimity and of our contentedness with God's arrangements, but also because we shall lean upon God, and feel strength in acting in union with Him. We know that He is irresistible in His purposes, and that He can according to His will move all things to the accom-

plishment of His designs. Job says: 'He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath resisted Him, and hath had peace?' (Job ix. 4); and elsewhere he says also: 'Submit thyself then to Him, and be at peace' (xxii. 21). The wicked have no peace (Isa. xlviii. 22) because they put themselves in opposition to God; but our Lord has promised peace to all who keep His word (St. John xiv. 27). Though difficulties arise, we shall not lose this sense of peace, as long as we strive to keep ourselves in conformity with the Divine will.

Finally, this conformity will win for us favour with God. 'You are my friends,' our Lord has said, 'if you do the things that I command you' (St. John xv. 14); at another time He said: 'Whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother' (St. Matt. xii. 50). If only we revere, honour and obey the Divine will, we shall be closely associated with our Lord, and be loved by His heavenly Father (St. John xiv. 23). God will give many proofs of His favour, by the special providence with which He will watch over the servant who is devoted to His will; and our Lord promises him the everlasting reward, where He says: 'He that doth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven' (St. Matt. vii. 21).

When you have weighed well these various considerations, you will desire to bring yourselves as far as possible into conformity with the Divine will, a will always directed by its intrinsic rectitude. You will see how desirable it is that you should love it.

Love the will of God, because it is the will of your heavenly Father; because it ordains everything for your good; and because your perfection, your happiness, your peace, and your reward, depend upon your conformity with it. God wills that you should fulfil His designs regarding you, that you should keep His commandments, correspond with His grace, advance in virtue and perfection, give glory to Him alone, bear afflictions patiently, fulfil your holy vocation, and labour for your sanctification and salvation. What other will should you have than this? How unreasonable it would be to oppose God's will in any of these matters! Pray, then, that you may have the grace ever to love this will, and to conform yourselves with it. What else could afford you true and durable satisfaction? For, as St. John says: 'The world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever' (1 St. John ii. 17).

## XVIII.

### *PRAYER.*

'Let us go, therefore, with confidence to the throne of grace. —HEB. iv. 16.

PRAYER is a duty incumbent on all Christians from the time of the first dawning of their reason until they yield up their last sigh. It is one of the first duties which the Christian parent impresses upon the child; it is prayer that sustains the vigour of the spiritual life against the power of the baser passions in youth and in maturer years; and it is also prayer that sanctifies and brings peace to man in his declining years, helping him to turn to good account the seemingly idle days of his old age. We may say, then, that the bird might as well try to soar aloft without wings, as that man should hope to reach his heavenly destination without prayer. We may also say that, as it fared with Israel in its fight with Amalec (Exod. xvii. 11), so will it fare with the Christian soul in its struggle against its enemies; as long as Moses kept his arms sustained in an attitude of prayer, Israel conquered; but when his arms fell, victory sided with Amalec. As long as the Christian perseveres in fulfilling the duty of prayer, his soul

will gain the mastery; but when he abandons prayer, then will his spiritual enemies overcome him.

How important a place, then, must prayer occupy among the duties of religious! The life of a good religious may be looked upon as one of continuous prayer. When not actually engaged in mental or vocal prayer, she may be said to be so virtually, because she sanctifies her other occupations by prayer. She is among the comparatively few who put in practice our Lord's lesson, 'that we ought always to pray, and not to faint' (St. Luke xviii. 1). Not that she overstrains her mind or becomes moody by this spirit of prayer, for it requires but the gentlest effort, and it becomes congenial to her pious disposition. But there cannot be true religious life without prayer. St. Teresa calls prayer one of the most important of the duties of a religious.

We will bring under our consideration in this conference the reasons why we should pray, the dispositions necessary for prayer, and the benefits which should result from prayer.

There are many reasons which might be adduced to convince us of the necessity and utility of prayer, but we may reduce them to two most particular reasons: the first, the duty of worshipping God; and the second, our own many needs.

St. John Damascene* defines prayer as the raising up of the mind to God. The creature must worship and give praise to his Creator by prayer; thus we hear David exclaim: 'With me is prayer to the God

* Quoted by St. Thomas, 2. 2, q. 83, a. 1.

of my life; I will say to God: Thou art my support . . . I will still give praise to Him, the salvation of my countenance and my God' (Ps. xli. 9, 10, 12). And David elsewhere shows us that prayer well made is acceptable to God, being even as fragrant incense before Him; for he addresses himself to God, saying: 'Let my prayer be directed as incense in Thy sight, the lifting up of my hands as evening sacrifice' (Ps. cxl. 2). In our prayer we must acknowledge God's greatness and supreme authority, His perfections, and our entire dependence upon Him; all this is really comprised in the very title which we give Him when we address Him as our God. It pleases us, however, and it cannot but please Him, if, as Holy Church does in her liturgy, we qualify this magnificent and all-sufficient title by adding such terms as 'Almighty,' 'Eternal,' 'Most merciful,' 'Most loving,' 'Most gracious,' or 'Most beneficent,' as such terms, while they give evidence of our faith, also inspire us with particular sentiments of reverence and devotion. We owe God the worship of our adoration and praise, and men have ever rendered it by prayer and sacrifice. 'Bring to the Lord,' says David, 'glory and honour . . . adore ye the Lord in His holy court' (Ps. xxviii. 2). This, too, was the command which St. John heard proclaimed by an angel in heaven: 'Fear the Lord, and give Him honour . . . and adore ye Him that made heaven and earth' (Apoc. xiv. 7). You give this worship in prayer; God demands it; you are eager to render it.

You owe to God, besides the service of adoration

and praise, the homage also of your thanksgiving, and this, too, is offered in prayer. 'What shall I render to the Lord,' asks David, 'for all the things that He hath rendered to me? I will take the chalice of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord' (Ps. cxv. 12, 13). Therefore did Mary utter her Magnificat: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord . . . because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid . . . because He that is mighty hath done great things to me' (St. Luke i. 46-49). Woe to the man who is so base as to forget his Divine Benefactor! All unworthy as we are of His regard, God has yet blessed us with countless natural and supernatural benefits; and He ever watches over us with a loving and merciful providence. Will we refuse Him the slight return of our gratitude and praise for all His goodness? 'Praise ye the Lord,' says David, exhorting us to bless God for His benefits, 'because psalm is good: to our God be joyful and comely praise' (Ps. cxlvi. 1). What thanksgiving in a special manner is owing by religious! They have received extraordinary favours, and they are the chosen friends of God; from them, therefore, is expected unceasing prayer and praise, in proof of their gratitude and devotedness to their heavenly Spouse. 'In all things,' St. Paul says, 'give thanks, for this is the will of God' (1 Thess. v. 18).

But our own many needs make prayer necessary to us. We are wholly dependent on God for all things, whether for soul or body. It is our duty to pray God to come to our aid, and to supply our

many wants. St. Thomas says that it is necessary for us to pray that we may obtain those blessings which God has appointed to bestow in answer to prayer.* He also quotes St. John Damascene as defining prayer as 'the asking for becoming things from God.' Perhaps prayer is, according to its strict meaning, a petition. Thus, David says to God: 'Let my prayer come in before Thee; incline Thy ear to my petition' (Ps. lxxxvii. 3). St. Teresa says: 'I do not see how God can come to us, or enrich us with His graces, if we shut the door against Him'—that is, if we neglect prayer. We may attribute to neglect or remissness in fulfilling the duty of prayer the spiritual destitution of so many souls, and their many falls and imperfections.

Let us convince ourselves of the extent of our dependence on God. We cannot of ourselves do anything meriting a supernatural reward without His grace, and He is the Author of all natural blessings. How shall we expect His gifts and favours, if we neglect to pray for them? By not praying for them we would give offence to God, and at the same time we would leave ourselves in our misery, poverty and weakness. We may ask ourselves what we should pray for. We should pray for our spiritual and temporal needs, for graces required, for blessings for each day and protection for each night, for favours for our relations and friends, for aid in our undertakings, for

* 'Oportet homines agere aliqua . . . ut per actus suos impleant quosdam effectus secundum ordinem a Deo dispositum. Necessarium est orare . . . ut impetremus quod Deus per sanctorum orationes disposuit implendum.'—2. 2, q. 83, a. 2.

support and consolation in sorrow, for patience and resignation in sufferings, for pardon when we have sinned, for our perseverance in grace, and for our eternal salvation. We should also pray when receiving the holy Sacraments, and when under temptation. When we have dwelt upon the many needs which we must commend to God in prayer, we shall recognise how necessary prayer is for our salvation. St. Augustine (L. de Eccl. Dogm., c. 16) says: 'We believe that no one will come to salvation except by God's call, that no one called will work out his salvation except by God's help, and that no one will deserve this help unless he prays.' Our Lord upon two notable occasions taught His disciples the necessity of prayer in time of temptation and spiritual danger. On one occasion He said: 'Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of man' (St. Luke xxi. 36); and on the other He said: 'Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation' (St. Matt. xxvi. 41).

We may push our demands beyond what is of strict necessity; we may ask for many graces and blessings. St. Augustine says we may lawfully pray for whatever we may lawfully desire. We may also beseech the just on earth, and the Angels and Saints in heaven, to pray for us. St. James says: 'Pray one for another, that you may be saved: for the continual prayer of a just man availeth much' (St. James v. 16). In proof of this he adduces the example of the holy prophet Elias, who by his prayers

closed the sky that there should be no rain, and who, by praying again, brought the much-needed rain. We read, too, how, after Judith had delivered her speech to the Ancients at Bethulia, striving to deter them from giving up the city to Holofernes, Ozias and the Ancients said to her: 'Now therefore pray for us, for thou art a holy woman, and one fearing God' (Judith viii. 29). We read, also, how, in the case of Heliodorus, God gave life even to a wicked man at the prayer of one who was just. When the saintly high-priest Onias and all the people had prayed God to preserve the treasures of the temple from Heliodorus, God punished this impious man. He was scourged, and was rendered speechless, and was about to die, when Onias prayed for him. Then heavenly messengers appeared to Heliodorus, and said: 'Give thanks to Onias the priest, because for his sake the Lord hath granted thee life' (2 Macc. iii. 33). We should, then, address ourselves with great earnestness and confidence to the Blessed Virgin and all our heavenly Patrons, who are the friends of God, to beseech them to use their intercessory power on our behalf.

We have now to consider with what dispositions we ought to pray. The most necessary, as well as the most profitable, dispositions for prayer are those of reverence, affection, humility, earnestness, and confidence. We will make a few reflections upon each.

We readily understand that, as our prayer is addressed to God, the Supreme Being, and as we are lowly suppliants, it should be made with becoming

reverence of mind and body. It is strictly of necessity that we should have the intention of praying, and therefore of complying with all that is required in prayer, and we should, moreover, strive to pray with lively faith and devout attention.

Ecclesiasticus says: 'Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God' (xviii. 23). To assume the attitude of prayer, and to utter forms of prayer, without having the intention of praying, would not be to pray. But we may consider how the case would be if, after having disposed ourselves for prayer, our mind were to become distracted; for concern at times arises on account of such distraction. If we really intend to pray, and intend to pray with becoming dispositions, then God will have regard to our good intentions, and these will be more or less meritorious according to the intensity of our affection towards God in forming them. If, however, during our prayer, without any voluntariness on our part, but through human frailty or from exterior causes, distractions occur, our good intentions still remain in full force, and God will still have regard to them. We should, however, when we become conscious of our distraction, strive to revert to becoming attention. It is necessary, you see, to distinguish between intention and attention. The distractions which I have just supposed to occur were not intended,* so there was no voluntary discontinuance of our good intention of praying becomingly.

* They were 'præter intentionem.' 'Attentam, saltem in prima intentione, oportet esse orationem.'—2. 2, q. 83, a. 13.

The case would be different if, during prayer, we were to turn away our attention voluntarily, and without necessity or sufficient reason, for then we should be guilty of disrespect. The questions, therefore, which in this matter we ought to ask ourselves are: Had I really the intention to pray, and to pray becomingly? Were my distractions voluntary or not?

The devout attention with which we should always endeavour to pray will result from a lively faith. Faith impresses upon our mind the fact that in prayer we speak to God, and that we are actually in His presence. The duty of prayer is therefore a sublime and privileged one. Faith also instructs us that by our prayer, even when we beseech God for mercy and other favours, we do homage to Him; for in every form of true prayer we recognise His greatness and His Divine perfections, His dominion over us, and our entire dependence on Him. Prayer demands attention on our part; if not a laboured attention to every word which we utter, or to the various impressions experienced during that holy exercise, at least a general attention in keeping with the spirit of prayer, and we must strive to banish all distractions. St. Gregory says that God does not hear that prayer to which the person who prays does not himself pay attention. We must pray with reverence of mind and of body. I will only say with regard to exterior reverence that we should withdraw ourselves from the manifest danger of distractions, and that we should adopt a becoming posture; but that when fatigue ensues, or is likely to ensue, it would be better to take this into consideration in

determining whether we should kneel, stand, or sit, than to cause interference with our prayer through a mistaken view as to what reverence demands.

When I say that we should pray with affection, I include in the notion of affection a sense of dutifulness, of devotion, of love of God, and of relish for prayer. It is our duty to pray, and we should therefore fulfil our devotional exercises, and raise our heart to God from time to time, because the child should address his heavenly Father, and the creature should praise and supplicate his Creator. Then, this duty should be accomplished in a spirit of piety and devotion, because of its nature, and because without such a spirit prayer would be wanting in one of its most pleasing qualities. Devotion may be described as the cream of prayer—without it prayer is insipid; or it may be said to be to prayer what colour and fragrance are to the flower, and what sweetness is to the voice. God does not ask for a dry formulary of words, but for devout sentiments of the heart. Prayer should especially be the expression of our love, for God is especially honoured by worship which is love. What will we hold back from God if we love Him? Prayer is as a sacrifice; we ourselves should be the victim—not our words only, but our heart. 'Of what avail,' asks St. Augustine, 'will be the noise of our lips if the heart be dumb?' If we are thus devoutly affected towards God, we shall feel a relish for prayer; we shall be happy to perform our devotional exercises, and to employ pious ejaculations in order to preserve our spirit of prayer, and save ourselves from a deteriorating dissipation of mind. We

shall also relish prayer because of the honourable communion which we by prayer hold with God. 'Consider,' St. John Chrysostom says, 'how much happiness is permitted to you, and how much glory is bestowed upon you, seeing that you may in prayers speak with God, and converse with Christ; that you may wish for what you like, and demand what you want.'

Another disposition required in prayer is humility. This should proceed from a truthful appreciation of what we are. Unfortunately, we do not sufficiently dwell upon the subject of our own lowliness, weakness, and sinfulness. We are ready to raise up our head, but not to cast it down. We are very sensitive about the opinion in which we are held, and we naturally look for appreciation and esteem. All this disposes us badly for self-abasement. God regards with special favour the prayer of the humble; we should therefore strive in all sincerity to practise self-abasement if we wish our prayers to please Him, and to obtain favour for ourse ves. We read how Judith, in her sublime prayer addressed to God before venturing upon her hazardous undertaking, said to Him: 'The prayer of the humble and the meek hath always pleased Thee' (Judith ix. 16). David says: 'He hath had regard to the prayer of the humble; and He hath not despised their petition' (Ps. ci. 18). And Ecclesiasticus says: 'The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds' (xxxv. 21). We should humble ourselves because of our lowliness, because of our sinfulness, and because we have no merits of our own to claim for us a hearing.

The disposition of earnestness should enter into all our prayers, and lead us to say them well. We know that we should try to do well whatever we do. We cannot expect God to be pleased with our prayers if He sees that we make no effort to pray well. Earnestness should also be displayed by our continuing to pray for particular intentions. We see how universal in the Church is the custom of making novenas; this affords us a lesson in earnestness. We should not content ourselves with asking once or twice for a special blessing, but we should persevere in our prayers. Our Lord teaches us this lesson in the parable of the man who wanted some loaves of bread, and who continued knocking at his friend's door until he obtained what he needed; and in the parable of the woman who had been wronged, who persevered in claiming justice, until at last the judge, to be relieved from her importunity, listened to her and avenged her. There are also, besides particular favours desired at certain times, most important objects which you should at all times make the subject of your prayers. Pray most earnestly day by day for the grace to overcome your failings; pray for the grace to be good religious; pray for the grace of final perseverance.

We come now to consider the necessity of the disposition of confidence. St. Paul says: 'Let us go with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid' (Heb. iv. 16). Our Lord teaches us the value of this disposition where He says: 'All things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive'

(St. Matt. xxi. 22). Confidence, you see, is made a condition of having our prayers heard. Our confidence is built up on our Lord's promises, on God's relationship to us as our heavenly Father, on our Lord's infinite merits, and on God's goodness, bounty, and love. 'If only,' Boetius says, 'our prayers are well made, they cannot be inefficacious.' In our trust in God we must mistrust our own judgment; we may not always ask for what is best for us, nor even for what is good for us. Our faith in God teaches us that He is as wise as He is loving; He will grant what we becomingly pray for if He sees that it will be for our good. St. Bernard says that He will give us either what we ask, or what He knows to be more useful. St. Augustine says that the physician knows better than the sick man what is good for him, and that God deals with us in a compassionate way equally whether He grants or refuses our petition, since He knows what is best for us. Our confidence in God should therefore lead us to be resigned to His will when He denies us what we ask, or delays to concede it. We must imitate our Lord, who said, after petitioning His Father that the chalice of His Passion might pass from Him, 'Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt' (St. Matt. xxvi. 39).

Having thus far considered the reasons why we should pray, and the dispositions with which we should pray, we have in conclusion to make a few reflections upon the benefit of prayer.

We cannot but recognise the happy results of prayer when we reflect that those who pray fre-

quently and fervently become the friends of God, and that He pours out His blessings upon them. God's grace draws them, and they advance in charity, piety, and holiness. We see this in the case of St. Teresa; addressing herself to God, she says: 'I cannot think of conversing with You without desiring to melt like wax in the fire of Your Divine love, and to consume all that is earthly in me by loving You.' We may not be privileged to experience, as the Saints did, rapturous sentiments of Divine charity; but God will reward our prayers by communicating to us a measure of sanctifying grace suitable to our condition and dispositions, and many actual graces as we need them. He will enlighten us, so that we may see and understand many truths, and follow the light which they shed upon our minds and upon our path. As a result of prayer we shall understand more clearly God's dealings with us and designs regarding us, the character of the worship which He requires at our hands, the blessings of religion, the dangers we must avoid, the benefit of the holy Sacraments, and such-like teaching. As a result of prayer, we shall receive supernatural help and strength, so as better to contend with our spiritual enemies, and to comply with the duties of our state. As a result of prayer, God will favour us with His consolations, so that we may support with becoming patience the crosses laid on us, and meet with Christian resignation the disappointments and sorrows appointed for us. How, then, shall we duly appreciate so valuable and indispensable a help to our spiritual well-being, and to our salvation? It may

be called the key of the Divine treasury. St. Raphael said to Tobias: 'Prayer is good with fasting and alms, more than to lay up treasures of gold' (Tob. xii. 8). It may also be called the Christian's armour against his foes; we shall not be overcome as long as we pray. In the Book of Wisdom it is called a shield, for, speaking of Aaron's having disarmed the anger of God by prayer, the holy writer says: 'A blameless man made haste to pray for the people, bringing forth the shield of his ministry, prayer' (Wisd. xviii. 21).

How thankful you should be in your holy vocation to be called so often to the duty of prayer! Love and appreciate this duty, and strive at all times to fulfil it with becoming reverence and fervour. If only you do this, you will advance daily in perfection, you will be strong in your vocation, you will multiply your merits, and you will make sure your salvation.

Be not of the number of those who, alas! pray but seldom, and who pray badly, or of those whose prayers are only an outward compliance with duty. Do such as these pretend to be still the friends of God? Do the callous deserve to be called His friends? But join yourselves to those who edify by their piety, and whose hearts ever sing to God the melody of praise. 'Let nothing hinder thee,' says Ecclesiasticus, 'from praying always' (xviii. 22). Take care, then, on the one hand, not to allow every pretext to become an excuse for omitting your devotional exercises; and, on the other hand, to cultivate the spirit of prayer, and accustom yourselves often

to raise your mind to God. Prayer will not only prove to you a means of sanctification: it will also bring you happiness, it will inspire you with a holy confidence, it will establish you in peace, and your prayers will go up as sweet incense before the throne of God (Apoc. viii. 4).

## XIX.

### *THE WAY OF PEACE.*

'Let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts.'—COL. iii. 15.

MANY passages met with in the Holy Scriptures reveal to us that in God's designs the followers of our Lord should enjoy peace of soul. How desirable a heritage is this holy peace for man who has fallen from favour, who has brought countless evils upon himself, and who has been incessantly assaulted by his spiritual foes! What reason man had in the dawn of the Incarnation to rise rejoicingly to a new life of energy and hope, while welcoming into the world the Prince of Peace, come to direct his feet 'into the way of peace'! (St. Luke i. 79). The birth into the world of the heavenly Prince is announced to men by angelic messengers, who, while giving glory to God, bring to them on so propitious an event an assurance of 'peace to men of good-will.' If the Angels proclaimed at the birth of Christ the advent of peace to men who should receive the tidings of salvation, our Lord Himself bequeathed to His disciples this heavenly grace of holy peace when He was about to leave them, saying: 'Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you' (St.

John xiv. 27). Finally, when He had by His Passion and death purchased for man his reconciliation with God, according to the prophecy, 'The chastisement of our peace was upon Him' (Isa. liii. 5), then was His greeting to His disciples ever the holy salutation of His peace: 'Peace be to you.' He came to bring together Jew and Gentile in a holy bond of fellowship, with the same faith and the same hope, upon the same path of justice, reconciling both to God, removing all the walls of division; as St. Paul says: 'He is our peace, who hath made both one, and breaking down the middle-wall of partition . . . that He might make the two in Himself into one new man making peace, and might reconcile both to God in one body by the Cross. . . . By Him we have access both in one Spirit to the Father' (Eph. ii. 14-18).

What do you desire so much as peace? Do you taste fully of this sweet heritage of God's elect, the blessings of this holy peace which our Lord has purchased for you at so high a price, and which He wishes you to enjoy? If you do not, what obstacles stand between you and this desirable contentment and tranquillity? Perhaps, when you have studied the matter well, you will perceive that the obstacles are chiefly of your own placing; that they are not insurmountable; and that, with God's grace and a good-will, you may remove them. How happy you will be if you do put them aside, and enter into the way of true peace!

There are some, alas! of whom the Psalmist says: 'The way of peace they have not known' (Ps. xiii. 3).

Sinners are far removed from it. The impenitent shall, when too late to save themselves, acknowledge how great their error was, and how unhappy they in reality were in the path which they chose. They shall say: 'We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways' (Wisd. v. 7). Like the wicked of Jerusalem with whom God was angry, they too perhaps said during their lifetime, 'Peace, peace, and there was no peace' (Jer. vi. 14); for there can be no true peace where there is grievous sin. The region of sin is one of disturbance, delusion, unrest, and spiritual misery; the Holy Scripture declares: 'There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord' (Isa. xlviii. 22).

There is another class of Christians in which some religious may possibly be found—the class of those whose peace is easily disturbed, and who do not enjoy a settled peace. In this class are unfaithful souls—those who divide their affections, who do not love duty, who are not whole-hearted with God, who are desponding, who are not willing to take up their cross daily, who seek inordinately self-gratification, who do not seriously strive to correct their faults, who continue in their tepidity, and all who are conscious of resisting the impulses of grace. It is not surprising that such as these do not fully experience and relish the blessings of peace, for God apportions His rewards according to the merits of His servants, and to the measure of their correspondence with His grace, and all these souls are notably in some respects unfaithful. If they would enjoy more perfect peace,

they must amend; they must seek and tread those ways in which it is to be found.

Let us confine our thoughts upon this subject to two considerations. We will make a short study of the character of what we understand to be the peace we ought to desire, and we will ask how this peace is to be attained and preserved.

You ought to desire a triple peace—peace with God, with your own conscience, and with your neighbour—for this desirable peace is the fruit of justice. Justice requires that you should fulfil your duties in relation to God, your own selves, and your neighbour, and your happiness is so bound up with this dutifulness that, if you fail in respect of even one of these classes of duties, the fulfilment of the rest (even if they were separable from it) will not bring you that peace and tranquillity which your soul desires. This preliminary general statement as to the triple foundation of your peace will be developed in sufficient detail in the course of our considerations.

It is necessary also to say that your condition of peace in this life does not suppose the absence of all contest, but victory in your struggles with your spiritual enemies, and patience and constancy under adversity and various temptations. Peace has been compared to a queen keeping in their proper place all the affections of the soul, and repressing the turbulence of the passions. It comes of the subjection of the flesh to the spirit, 'for these are contrary one to another' (Gal. v. 17). If not ever engaged with the enemy, you must yet be ever ready to meet him, and this is one of the conditions of your peace

and security, according to our Lord's saying: 'When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth' (St. Luke xi. 21).

What, then, is the character of that peace which Christ left you as a heritage in the Church, the possession of which the religious life should secure to you? That peace should be true, not false; interior, not in appearance only; and lasting, therefore not a mere truce.

You seek, in the first place, a peace that is true; it must therefore be built up on a solid foundation. You will not be content that it should be built upon any less trustworthy foundation than God Himself. The peace you seek is peace in God, peace in Christ, that holy peace of which our Lord said, 'Not as the world giveth, do I give unto you' (St. John xiv. 27), and of which St. Paul wrote: 'And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus' (Phil. iv. 7). You do not seek a peace which rests upon the unstable foundation of anything worldly or transient, upon riches, possessions, honours, friendships, amusements, good cheer, vanities, conveniences, health, renown, success, praise, or esteem. Whatever measure of any of these comforts or worldly gratifications God may bestow, you will accept with gratitude and refer to His glory; but you will not allow your peace to depend upon their bestowal or withdrawal. The supernatural wisdom which enables you to raise your eyes to loftier considerations, so as even to despise these worldly ones, comes from the

Holy Ghost; it teaches you to seek God in all things, and to use the good things of life only according to God's designs in bestowing them. If you do so use them, they will not disturb your peace. But when men seek in these things their peace and contentment, then—because such things pass quickly from their possession, and are never held with any reliable security—upon losing them, their peace of mind vanishes, and is succeeded by chagrin, despondency, and disappointment. The peace they enjoyed was false, and their security was like that of the rich man of the parable who made extensive provision for all his harvest and stock, and then said to his soul, 'Take thy rest'; but the message came to him: 'Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee' (St. Luke xii. 20). Your peace will be true if your whole life and affection, your aim and desire, have no other object except God; so that you seek only to please Him, use all things for His glory, embrace dutifully all His designs in your regard, and love others in Him and for His sake. Thus will you rest in God, then will your peace be unshaken, being built up on the only imperturbable foundation. 'The kingdom of God,' says St. Paul, 'is not meat and drink, but justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost' (Rom. xiv. 17).

You seek, in the second place, a peace which is interior; it must be peace of mind, conscience, and heart, therefore peace of soul. You do not seek a peace which can be disturbed and dispelled by every passing storm, but a peace deep down in the tranquillity of your soul. This is the peace of the good

steward who has a consciousness of having taken care of the goods confided to him, and who is not afraid of the day of reckoning; of the faithful servant who is ready for his lord's return; of the wise virgin prepared for the coming of the bridegroom, who has her lamp trimmed, well supplied with oil, and burning brightly. There are men who wear an air of contentment, and who are looked upon by others as fortunate, but who have a disturbed mind and conscience; there are perhaps religious also who try to be joyous and placid in the exterior, but whose unsatisfactory dispositions disturb their peace of heart. St. Paul says: 'Let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts.' Peace in the exterior is deceptive, it may be unreal; but when it is firmly established in the soul, born of grace and dutifulness, it is real, and it imparts joy and consolation. This interior peace is the only peace worthy of the name. Though it may be fostered by exterior graces, it is not produced by external agencies, nor is it reached by them; it therefore baffles the efforts of tempters and persecutors seeking its destruction as long as its possessor, corresponding with grace, resists their machinations. Even as the anchor buried deep in the waters steadies the ship in the storm, so does interior peace give security to the soul when exposed to the tempests of temptations and contradictions. You must seek this peace by dutifulness, and by fidelity in following the dictates of an enlightened conscience; in other words, you must be, as St. Peter says, 'good stewards of the manifold grace of God' (1 St. Pet. iv. 10).

In the third place, you seek a lasting peace. You set but little value on what you cannot retain; so it could not be expected that you should set your hearts upon acquiring a peace which would soon pass from you. It is not to a transient peace that you are called to aspire, because the peace which our Lord purchased at so high a price and bequeathed to you is that 'abundance of peace' of which 'there shall be no end' foretold by the prophets (Ps. lxxi. 7; Isa. ix. 7), and which St. Paul prayed might be bestowed when he wrote: 'The Lord of peace Himself give you everlasting peace in every place' (2 Thess. iii. 16). The sinner even may at times enjoy a delusive and transient peace, but he is denied that spiritual and blessed peace which is one of the fruits of the Holy Ghost's dwelling in the soul (Gal. v. 22), and which therefore is bestowed only upon the just. Of the sinner it is said: 'Thou hast forsaken the fountain of wisdom, for if thou hadst walked in the way of God, thou hadst surely dwelt in peace for ever' (Bar. iii. 12, 13). God does not lend this holy peace to the just, He gives it: 'My peace I give unto you.' We may therefore apply to this gift what St. Paul says: 'The gifts . . . of God are without repentance' (Rom. xi. 29). We may drive it from our hearts by our own act, but God bestows it as a lasting gift. It is this spiritual and lasting character of Christian peace which sets its value above that of every conceivable gain or treasure which is only transient; it comes of union in membership with Christ, and of the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. Death itself, which

removes us from all worldly joys and possessions, will not rob us of this heavenly peace, but will confirm us in it, and bring us to its everlasting possession. Whereas the wicked who have not known the way of peace depart this life in despair, the just man who has walked in it meets his end in hope, as though saying in the language of the Psalmist, 'In peace in the self-same I will sleep, and I will rest' (Ps. iv. 9).

You have now to ask yourselves how this desirable peace is to be attained and preserved. I am not addressing myself to those who are strangers to it, but I wish only to confirm you in your possession of it, and in your love of it, that you may relish yet more and more the blessings of those who have found the way of peace, and who walk in it. Speaking generally, it must be said that justice is the way and means of acquiring peace and tranquillity of soul—yea, peace with God and man in this life, and afterwards the beatific peace of heaven. The very word, in the Hebrew, is said to signify every good, felicity itself, and eternal beatitude. The psalmist has said: 'Justice and peace have kissed' (Ps. lxxxiv. 11); and St. Augustine, commenting upon these words, writes: 'Do you wish to have peace? Then do justice, for they are bosom friends. Perhaps you wish for peace, but fail to comply with the requirements of justice. There is no one who does not desire peace, but all are not willing to accomplish justice.' We understand by these words what is so clearly and so frequently asserted by the Holy Ghost in the Sacred Scriptures—that sin destroys true peace, and that

therefore sinners are deprived of those blessings of peace which are reserved for the just only.

The way of peace, being the way of justice, is therefore the way of those who trust in God, who have a well-regulated conscience, and who fulfil the duties of charity towards their neighbour. All in whom these conditions are realized enjoy the peace of Christ.

Those who trust in God, as do the just, rest in Him and have peace. They seek Him in the morning of life, in the noontide, and at its close. The question with them, as they pursue day by day the path marked out for them, is, 'What is God's will, and how may I please Him?' A religious should be ever associated with these servants of God; her life should be one of doing and suffering for God's sake. In doing all for God, she will be guided by the commandments, and by the rule of life given to her by her institute. Faithful for God's sake to what is thus laid down for her, she will be saved from the snares and dangers which beset the path of the unwise, and she will rest peacefully in her trust in God. 'Much peace,' says David, 'have they that love Thy law, and to them there is no stumbling-block' (Ps. cxviii. 165). Her trust in God makes her humble, faithful to grace, and earnest in prayer; she feels that she must turn to Him at all times, must avail herself of the helps which He provides as support for her soul, and must ever pray—at one time in supplication, at another in thanksgiving, but always in a spirit of praise and love. Thus does it appear that religion in her case is a reality, a constant service of her Divine Master.

This religious who trusts in God and tastes of His peace is not less faithful when there is question of suffering. She knows that by God's will this life is encumbered with cares, and that her sanctification depends in a very large measure upon the patience with which she meets and bears the trials and sorrows which are wisely apportioned to her. She therefore brings to bear upon them the teaching of faith, lest, looking in an ignorant manner upon them, she should be carried away by the impetuosity of nature, and come to turn to her spiritual disadvantage what God designs for both her temporal and eternal good. In the matter of her sufferings, too, she shows her trust in God; she bows her head in submission to them, and offers them to God. She remembers how our Lord foretold to His disciples what they should suffer, and how He encouraged them and counselled them; she takes to herself His words: 'In your patience you shall possess your souls' (St. Luke xxi. 19). Under her trials and humiliations, she manifests meekness and humility as well as patience, according to the Apostle's advice, that she may yet receive the fruit of her sufferings: 'Be you humbled therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in the time of visitation' (1 St. Pet. v. 6). 'Think not strange,' says the same Apostle, 'the burning heat which is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you; but if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that when His glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy' (1 St. Pet. iv. 12, 13). Thus in doing and in suffering does the good religious put her trust in

God, and receive as her reward the blessings of a holy peace.

The way of peace is, secondly, the way of those who have a well-regulated conscience. This condition is bound up with the first, and next only in importance to it; it may be termed the condition of dutifulness. When your conscience is properly enlightened, and you follow its dictates, you are following what is practically to you at the moment the voice of God. If, however, reasonable doubt should arise, you should seek fuller enlightenment, and then follow the counsels of wisdom and prudence. If no such doubt arises, the voice of your conscience is the voice of reason, and also of religion as you understand it; and this voice of religion and reason is imperative in its dictates, being the intimate guide of your moral conduct, which you would disregard or oppose at your risk. You act dutifully when you follow your conscience. When, in the past, your conscience has said, 'This is wrong,' 'You ought not to do this,' or 'You must not neglect this,' how often, alas! you have turned a deaf ear to it, and thereby disregarded this practical guide, and incurred the moral evil—lesser or greater, as it may have been—of doing so! Upon those occasions you disturbed your peace of conscience, there was strife within you; an ill-balanced mind, and a weak will drawn to what was wrong, withstood and contradicted a conscience which pointed to what was right. A religious who acts conscientiously has peace; she sides with authority and not with rebellion, with right and not with wrong, with order and not with disorder, with

duty and not with neglect, with God and not with His enemies, or in opposition to His grace. Opposed to dutifulness are neglect, hypocrisy, disorder, contumacy, and inconstancy; these undermine peace. Seek, then, the way of peace through a well-regulated conscience and dutifulness; but if at times through frailty you are guilty of any fault, do not give way to despondency—this will only cause more faults, and increase your discomfiture. Upon realizing your fall, hasten to repent interiorly; resolve to confess your fault, and without delay renew your good resolutions, and strive by greater fervour and devotedness to make amends.

The way of peace, lastly, is the way of those who live in charity with their neighbour. That the maintenance of charity is necessary for the maintenance of peace, you may gather from many passages of the Holy Scriptures. I will quote two. St. Paul says: 'Above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection; and let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, wherein also you are called in one body' (Col. iii. 14, 15). He says again: 'With all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity; careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph. iv. 2, 3). You are all members of one body, of which the head is Christ, and in your own institute you are all joined together in religious membership; misunderstandings and coldness among the members cannot but disturb the peace of those who are the cause of these breaches of charity. If you would preserve charity, avoid contention (Phil. ii. 3) about offices and duties, about

goods and commodities; and, in a spirit of humility, respect and esteem your neighbour, and restrain yourselves from making unkind remarks, or causing pain in other ways. Whatever wounds charity, wounds peace. 'Be of one mind, have peace,' says St. Paul, 'and the God of peace and of love shall be with you' (2 Cor. xiii. 11).

The chief enemies of peace are the devil and your own wayward will. Be on your guard against them. The Evil Spirit, if he cannot lead you into mortal sin which is utterly destructive of peace, will yet tempt you and try to delude you, so as to upset your peace of conscience, and cause alarm and misgiving to your soul; or he will endeavour to sow in your hearts the seeds of despondency or disaffection. Your own wayward will, restless under discipline and feeding on selfishness, will raise difficulties to lead you from dutifulness, and will kick against the restraints which the obligations of charity impose. The religious state is the Eden of the Church; it is a garden walled in, and protected from the tempests which do such havoc in the world. But as in Eden there reigned peace until Satan tempted man, and until upon man's fall his passions were let loose, so will it be in the garden of the religious life. Be, then, on your guard against the temptations of Satan, and against self-love, envy, fickleness, pride, and all the other weaknesses of your wayward wills, which would lead to the disturbance, diminution, or loss of the holy heritage of peace.

How happy you will be, while dutiful in your religious life, in possessing that true, interior, and

lasting peace which is the portion of God's faithful servants. 'The work of justice shall be peace,' prophesied Isaias, 'and the service of justice quietness, and security for ever; and My people shall sit in the beauty of peace, and in the tabernacles of confidence' (Isa. xxxii. 17, 18). These blessings, tasted in the Church on earth, are only a foretaste of the richer blessings destined for the elect in the city of peace, the heavenly Jerusalem. If only you are faithful to conscience and to duty, let no cross, or sorrow, or labour, or temptation, weigh upon you in the land of your sojourn, so as to cause you to lose that holy peace which you are to taste now, but to be inundated with when you shall be gathered together before the throne of the Lamb, the Prince of Peace, where 'His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His Face' (Apoc. xxii. 3, 4).

## SEVENTH DAY.

### XX.

*LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.*

'Before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves.'—1 ST. PET. iv. 8.

So excellent is the virtue of charity that God wishes it to reign everywhere, on earth as well as in heaven, between Himself and all His creatures, between Angel and Angel, between Angels and men, between both these and the suffering souls, and between man and man. Only one region is excluded—the region of the accursed. Oh that we all could enter fully into the designs of God in the matter of charity! Peace would then be associated with charity in the hearts of all, and man's happiness would be all but complete. Alas that the weakness and perversity of men stand in the way of the realization of such beneficent designs! The reign of charity on earth began and ended in Eden. Since the fall of our first parents there came upon the human race envies, contentions, rancour, hatred, jealousies, and every form of uncharitableness, with sad results which

have darkened the pages of both sacred and profane history with narrations of numberless deplorable crimes and miseries. What a lesson this should be to all! When there was charity, there were peace and happiness; when charity failed, there were crimes, wars, and every conceivable evil.

Even in religion charity does not always reign supreme. How many of your falls and miseries may be traced to some failure in charity! When you wounded your neighbour and pained him, you wounded yourself even more seriously, and inflicted upon yourself greater misery. Your wound was the sin of uncharitableness, and your misery the disturbance of your peace of mind and conscience. When will you realize how important it is to struggle earnestly against every kind of uncharitableness? Since many of your faults come from this source, how shall it be said that you are sincere in your conversion, if you do not detest them, repent of them, and try to avoid them? Let one of the efforts which you purpose, God helping you, to make after your retreat be an earnest endeavour to cultivate the holy virtue of charity with greater assiduity than in the past.

In inviting your attention to this important subject, I do not intend to treat you to a theological discussion, or to take up all the points which might be considered in relation to it. Let us content ourselves with several of the many practical considerations which the subject suggests. Let us first see in what way charity should be practised, and then try

to learn to appreciate this virtue because of the happy results of its practice.

One of the maxims of St. Francis of Sales was that 'we ought to love our neighbour upon earth as we shall love him in heaven.' You would fulfil all the requirements of charity if you only acted up to this maxim. Your charity must be interior as well as exterior, and you must avoid all ill-will and hatred. Speaking generally, if you deliberately injure your neighbour in thought, desire, intention, word or deed, or if you deliberately exclude any neighbour from your charity, you fail to comply with the commandment. It is not enough to avoid breaches of charity, you must also be affected charitably towards your neighbour. The precept is a positive one: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (St. Matt. xix. 19). You are affected charitably towards your neighbour if you live in charity with those with whom you have relations, if you desire the welfare of all, if in a Christian spirit you pray for all, and if you are prepared as occasion arises to fulfil the duties which charity imposes.

You are to manifest this charity in the various ways, though not necessarily in the same measure, that you love yourself; do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Do not unto others what you would not have others do unto you. To love your neighbour as the precept requires demands the exercise of many virtues, as of humility, self-restraint, forbearance, unselfishness, generosity, patience, and prudence. This should teach you of how high an

order this virtue of charity is, and how meritorious is the practice of it.

Charity towards your neighbour should, in the first place, be practised as an obligation imposed upon you by Almighty God. The essential duties of this virtue are not of supererogation, but of precept. You recognise in other respects the wisdom and excellence of God's law: recognise it also in this. You own your obligations in regard of other points of the law: own them also in this. You fulfil the other precepts willingly, cordially, exactly and fully: fulfil also this in the same manner. The law has been promulgated by God: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' It remains only for you to obey it, and to render obedience to it for God's sake. Our Lord has confirmed the obligation of this precept, and in doing so He raises the standard to a more perfect charity, declaring that we are to love our neighbour not only as we love ourselves, but even as He has loved us. 'A new commandment,' He said, 'I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another' (St. John xiii. 34, 35). With these precepts under your eyes, do not say, 'What is my neighbour to me?' God has made him something to you—a creature of the same Creator, a child of the same heavenly Father, one redeemed by the same Divine Redeemer, an aspirant to the same everlasting reward. In the case of your neighbour, who is a member of the same institute, there are also special claims upon your charity; for

if St. Paul said, 'Let us work good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith' (Gal. vi. 10), even greater charity should be manifested to those who belong to the same religious family. 'If you love Me,' our Lord says, 'keep My commandments.' Then, if we love Him, we must love our neighbour, because He commands it.

Consider now, in the second place, some of the requirements of charity, and especially the conduct which is opposed to this virtue. These considerations will enable you to make a practical examination of how you observe the precept.

Charity requires that you should think kindly of your neighbour, and that you should not entertain rash judgments concerning his character or conduct: moreover, that your appreciation of him should be formed in a charitable spirit. You may not find any difficulty in practising this interior charity when you are naturally drawn towards a neighbour, or when his eminently pleasing qualities merit your regard. In such cases the exercise of charity is easy. But will you practise virtue only when it is easy to do so? Are you excused from its practice when it is attended by difficulties? As to your judgments, beware of arriving at those which are unfavourable; view your neighbour's conduct (if you cannot help viewing it) in every favourable light which it will admit of before you arrive at a conclusion adverse to your neighbour. How frequently your judgments are wrong, and the error is not found out for a long time. How frequently, too, they are hastily arrived

at, and therefore likely to be wrong. It is not required that you should be scrupulous in this matter. When you cannot help forming some opinion of your neighbour or his conduct, and when everything about him, or about his conduct in a particular case, forces you to arrive at an unfavourable conclusion concerning him, you must hold him to be at fault ; but deal as leniently with him as you can, even as you would wish him to deal with you if his case were your own. There are two texts which you would do well to bear in mind, to check you when you are tempted to form judgments of your neighbour. In the one our Lord says : 'Judge not, that you may not be judged ; for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged ; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again' (St. Matt. vii. 1, 2). In the other St. Paul says : 'Who art thou that judgest another man's servant ? To his own Lord he standeth or falleth' (Rom. xiv. 4). As to your appreciation of your neighbour, even when there are evident faults of character or conduct, he still remains your neighbour, and the commandment still remains in force. St. Francis of Sales says : 'We must not love our neighbour merely because he is virtuous, or because we hope he may be so, but because God commands us.' You should not love the faults of which your neighbour is guilty, but your neighbour himself, who before he committed them was without fault, and who will again be without fault when they have been forgiven. Your charity is not to be an ever-varying commodity, changing according to your neighbour's conduct, but

a steadfast virtue, holding all bound together in Christ in a holy fellowship and union. 'Before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves.' Avoid, then, such faults as taking upon yourself judgment as to your neighbour, meddling with what does not concern you, the inclination to regard your neighbour censoriously or unfavourably, jumping rashly at conclusions, and all dislike. 'To bear with our neighbour's imperfections,' says St. Francis of Sales, 'is one of the chief points of the love we owe him.' You should, as far as you can, close your eyes to what is faulty in him, and take pleasure in noting what is good.

Charity requires that in your exterior conduct you should show your neighbour due consideration. How can he know that you are in charity with him except by your words, manner, and actions? These must bear the stamp of charity upon them. If your remarks are unfeeling and discourteous, if your manner is repelling or impudent, and if you do unkind things or refuse to perform services which your neighbour reasonably expects at your hands, the virtue of charity is wounded, and your neighbour is pained. If the flame of charity burns in your heart, it will manifest itself in your exterior conduct. The exercise of this virtue is inculcated by St. Paul where he speaks of the bond of union which our Lord has established among His followers. He says: 'Christ is all, and in all. Put ye on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. . . . Above all

these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection' (Col. iii. 11-14).

In practising this love of your neighbour, show him consideration and spare his feelings; such is the conduct which you would wish others to observe towards yourself. It is very easy to wound the feelings of others by your words, manner, or actions. If you respect your neighbour, you will see in him a fellow-being, a fellow-Christian; you will remember his dignity and the claims which this gives him upon your consideration; you will remember that God loves him, and commands you also to love him; and, if your neighbour is a member of your institute, you will remember how she is bound to you by special ties, and engaged with you in the same holy works. Respect, then, her feelings, extend to her a most abundant charity. Do not, in order to make her feel her inferiority, vaunt your own superiority, or point out in an unkind manner her weaknesses. Never press your advantage over her too far, if at all; conceal, rather, those things in which your superiority lies. When it will further the cause of charity, be willing to abase yourself. Our Lord has given you the example of doing so; He, being God, became man for love of men. Be willing to do honour to others, and to extol their virtues and good works. All this supposes Christian humility and generosity. It is the counsel of St. Paul where he says: 'Let nothing be done through contention, neither by vain-glory; but in humility, let each esteem others better than themselves; each one not considering the things that are his own, but those

that are other men's. For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus' (Phil. ii. 3-5). Charity requires that you should not speak unnecessarily or unkindly of your neighbour's faults; that, when you have been forced to take an unfavourable view of your neighbour's character or conduct, you should keep this view to yourself; and that you should avoid discussions regarding your neighbour, except when edification will result from them. Charity requires, moreover, that you should not show either antipathy or want of sympathy, or adopt a stand-off manner, in your relations with your neighbour. How painful is that coldness of manner which seems to say, 'What are you to me, or what am I to you?' and that ungenerous and unbecoming superiority of bearing which tries to make others feel small!

Charity, however, does not mean familiarity; it does not mean the breaking down of those barriers against disrespect which religion, as well as society, deems necessary in order to restrain what is inordinate. True charity respects the neighbour, and ordains with admirable wisdom the relations which should exist between equals and between superiors and inferiors; it does not permit vulgarity, disrespect, or undue freedom of speech or manner.

It should aid you in practising charity—particularly when you seem to perceive faults in your neighbour—to remember yourself, to look into your own case. It is very easy to find fault with others, but what about your own faults? Is it not perhaps more difficult for your neighbour to exercise charity towards you than for you to exercise it towards him? Are

you kind, amiable, thoughtful for others, generous, patient? Do you try at all times to make yourself agreeable with others, to enliven the conversation, to do little kindnesses, to spare others trouble, to enter cheerfully into their plans or amusements, and to help them in their work? Do you show sympathy when they are sick or in sorrow, and do you try to counsel them for the best when they seek your advice? What if you are selfish, insincere, designing, morose, inconsiderate, unobliging, unfeeling, short-tempered, censorious, sarcastic, or haughty? If any of these faults in speech or manner may be laid at your door, would you not do well, before looking in an unkindly manner on your neighbour, to remember our Lord's words: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her' (St. John viii. 7). If, notwithstanding your faults, your neighbour has to live in charity with you, will you not strive to fulfil in his regard all that charity demands? Do you expect all the forbearance to be on his side?

We have considered in what way charity should be practised, and noted many of the faults which should be avoided; it remains now to consider the happy results which the practice of charity should produce, that you may learn to appreciate more and more so exalted a virtue.

The practice of charity will, in the first place, make you more pleasing to God. 'God is charity,' says St. John, and this beloved disciple insists that to enjoy God's love we must love our neighbour. 'If we love one another,' he says, 'God abideth in

us, and His charity is perfected in us. . . . If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. . . . And this commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God love also his brother' (1 St. John iv. 12, 20, 21). That you love one another is therefore a condition of God's abiding in you; see, then, how much God values your love of your neighbour! God loves you, and He loves your neighbour; but charity, it would seem, is not perfected unless you love both Him and your neighbour. This should convince you of the excellence of charity, and, if you love your neighbour, of the satisfaction which you give to God, who has established the conditions upon which charity is founded and perfected. If an earthly father takes delight in seeing affection and union reign among his children, will not your heavenly Father, 'of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named' (Eph. iii. 15), take pleasure in seeing His children bound together in the bond of a holy charity? The practice of this virtue will also give pleasure and honour to our Lord; for, as we have seen, He wishes it to be the distinctive mark of His followers: 'By this shall all men know that you are My disciples.' Not only by His own condescensions, by His word and example, does He inculcate the practice of charity, but also by the writings of the Apostles, who knew His wishes and the necessity of this virtue in God's elect. Listen, too, to the aged St. John, ever preaching the same sermon: 'Little children, love one another.' At last his disciples and brethren expostulated, saying: 'Master, why always this same exhortation?' 'Because,'

answered St. John, 'it is the precept of the Lord, and if only it be fulfilled it is enough.' The practice of charity will give pleasure to the Holy Spirit, for this virtue is one of the fruits of the Holy Ghost (Gal. v. 22). St. Paul, too, says: 'The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us' (Rom. v. 5). The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of love, and He dwells in you (1 Cor. iii. 16); will He not, then, take delight in seeing you correspond with His graces and keep faithfully this commandment of loving one another? (1 St. John iii. 23). Be assured therefore that you will ever reach the heart of your heavenly Father, God, through the heart of His child, who is your neighbour.

Another result of the practice of charity will be peace—peace in your own heart, and peace with those about you. 'Let us,' says St. Paul, 'follow after the things that are of peace, and keep the things that are of edification one towards another' (Rom. xiv. 19). Where charity reigns, there are no contentions and misunderstandings, offence is not given or taken, and ill-will is unknown. The truly charitable are thus spared many of the miseries of this life. How happy is that religious community in which the members respect and esteem one another, spare and help one another, and speak kindly one of another! 'Behold,' says the psalmist, 'how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!' (Ps. cxxxii. 1). Undoubtedly the maintenance of charity and peace will not be effected without the exercise of restraint, moderation, patience, and condescension; you must

often give in to the whims of others, upset your own plans, bear with inconsiderateness, and suppress feelings of annoyance; but when these little sacrifices have been made, you will know that the gain has been on the side of virtue, and you will be thankful that you made them, and thus contributed to the cause of peace.

Another result of the display of charity will be the regard with which it will inspire others towards yourself—it will win confidence and esteem, and will engender in others a spirit of charity. Others will perceive that your charity is supernatural, that it is exercised in spite of contradictions and difficulties, and that there is no selfishness about it; this will lead them to show you forbearance, and even to vie with you in practising charity. The truly charitable have many friends, and they exercise a beneficial sway over others. The edification of your charity will be fruitful in good.

Lastly, the result of charity will be an abundant supernatural reward. 'Before all things,' St. Peter says, 'have a constant mutual charity among yourselves, for charity covereth a multitude of sins' (1 St. Pet. iv. 8). By your charitable acts and conduct you merit God's regard towards yourself; for His sake you show consideration for your neighbour, therefore will He show consideration for you. This is promised by those words of our Lord which I have already quoted: 'With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.' More than this: our Lord will reward as shown to Himself the charity which for His sake you show to your

neighbour: 'Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me' (St. Matt. xxv. 40). And be assured, the more it costs you to practise charity, the richer will be your reward.

Let me, in conclusion, exhort you to turn to the Sacred Heart for counsel and for strength. What, in this matter of charity towards your neighbour, do you believe to be the desire of the Sacred Heart? Strive to correspond with what you believe that desire to be. Look into your heart to see if there is any rancour or uncharitableness there; if so, regret it sincerely, and strive to root it out and cast it from you. Aim at interior charity, for the seat of charity is in the heart. If your affections are centred in yourself, there is something seriously wrong; for Christian charity directs you to regard also your neighbour. Watch over your thoughts, your words, your manner, and your actions. In your prayers, especially in Holy Communion, ask for the gift of charity. Notwithstanding your efforts to practise this admirable virtue, you will often experience great difficulty in doing so, and you may yet offend against charity in various ways; but let not your uncharitableness be designed or persistent; repent speedily of your falls, and make what reparation you can. You know that there is a double malice in sins against charity—they strike at both God and your neighbour; therefore should you be doubly on your guard against them. But the exercise of charity is doubly meritorious; for while manifesting love for your neighbour, you are actuated by the love of

God, and your reward will be measured accordingly. There will always be a wide field for its exercise; while a single neighbour remains, there will ever be a call upon it. Look, then, upon charity as very necessary to you, and cultivate it with assiduity; it is the magnet of grace, the corner-stone of religion, 'the bond of perfection,' the eminent virtue of the Saints. Strive to 'have a constant mutual charity among yourselves,' for, as St. Paul says, 'you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. iii. 28).

## XXI.

### *THE HOLY EUCHARIST.*

'Behold, I am with you all days.'—ST. MATT. xxviii. 20.

WHILE St. John was wondering at the vast number of the Blessed whom he saw before the throne in heaven, one of the Ancients, in explaining to him who they were, said: 'The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall rule them, and shall lead them to the fountains of the waters of life' (Apoc. vii. 17). To anyone familiar with the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament as practised in the Church it might appear that these words described the mysterious sway which our Lord exercises in the Holy Eucharist over the hearts of the faithful, and the outpouring of His grace through that sacred channel upon their souls. In the heaven of heavens, where St. John beheld the vision and heard these words, the Lamb was the centre of worship, and from His throne He ruled the multitudes of the Blessed who were gathered around it. The Lamb has also a throne in His Church, and before it and around it the faithful come to worship, to return thanks, to seek consolation, to find relief, to express

love, to make their petitions, and even to partake of the Flesh of the Lamb, which is to them the Bread of Life and the pledge of salvation.

What is this throne, and where is it to be found? It is the throne of the Son of God in the Holy Eucharist, and it is found in the midst of every congregation of Catholic people, and in the heart of every religious community. Our Lord has said: 'Behold, I am with you all days.' From every tabernacle—veiling His Divinity, His sacred humanity, His face, hands, body and blood, and His very being—He comforts His people, and pours out upon them His graces and benedictions. More than this, from the altar and tabernacle, after He has first given Himself to His priests, He next approaches and bestows Himself upon His people.

Come then to contemplate some of the wonders of the Holy Eucharist. What can be conceived more wonderful or more consoling than this mystery of God's love? I purpose bringing under your consideration various thoughts which it suggests, hoping that the impression which they will make upon your mind may lead you to increased piety in all your relations with our Lord in these sacred mysteries.

'Behold,' said our Lord, 'I am with you all days.' He has taken up His place in our midst, both by the mystery of the Incarnation, in which He assumed our nature and came amongst men on earth, and by that other mystery which remains as a memorial or 'remembrance of His wonderful works' (Ps. cx. 4), the Holy Eucharist, in which He perpetuates His Presence and His operations amongst us. Through

both of these wonderful mysteries the great and all-holy God has come nigh to us, to bring us the blessings of sanctification, support, peace, and salvation. With what reverence, then, in the first place, they should inspire us!

In the Holy Eucharist, as well as in the Incarnation, it is God Himself who has established His relations with His creatures. Of His greatness David said: 'O Lord God of Hosts, who is like to Thee? Thou art mighty, O Lord, and Thy truth is round about Thee. . . . Thine are the heavens, and Thine is the earth' (Ps. lxxxviii. 9, 12); and the prophet Jeremias: 'There is none like to Thee, O Lord; Thou art great, and great is Thy Name in might' (x. 6). Then, how unapproachable He is in His all-holiness! He is holy in His essence. 'Be holy,' He says, 'because I am holy.' He is holy in His operations. 'The Lord,' says David, 'is holy in all His works' (Ps. cxliv. 17). And He is holy in His dwelling-place. 'Thou,' says again David, 'dwellest in the holy place' (Ps. xxi. 4); 'Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days' (Ps. xcii. 5). Yet, notwithstanding our Lord's supreme greatness and all-holiness, He vouchsafes to come to us, His poor, lowly, weak and sinful creatures. Oh, let not the humble veils under which He dwells in the Holy Eucharist cause us to forget that He is the very Son of God; let us confess with the prophet: 'Verily Thou art a hidden God' (Isa. xlv. 15).

These mysteries should inspire us not only with reverence, but also, in the next place, with admiration and love; for we see equally displayed in the

Incarnation and in the Holy Eucharist our Lord's power, wisdom, and goodness.

In the one mystery, the Incarnation, we see the wonder of His being born of a virgin, and we learn from the Angel that this is a display of Divine power: 'The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee' (St. Luke i. 35). When this power was exercised, then, as St. John says, 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us' (St. John i. 14). In the other mystery, the Holy Eucharist, we see this same Divine power displayed in wonderful ways in the change of the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the Body and Blood of our Lord, with the consequence that our Lord is brought really and substantially by this Sacrament into our midst.

In the one mystery, in the Incarnation, we see displayed the Divine wisdom, inasmuch as therein our Lord, having assumed human nature and united it in His Person to the Divine nature, undid—and undid becomingly, and even magnificently—the work of sin, consulting at the same time God's claims and man's needs, completely and adequately satisfying the Divine justice, while repairing man's fall, restoring his dignity, and even giving man higher favours than those which he enjoyed previously when in the state of original justice. In the other mystery, in the Holy Eucharist, we see the display of this same Divine wisdom in the wonderful union which is effected in Holy Communion between our Lord and those whom He has redeemed, in the daily offering of Himself to His Eternal Father in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and in His sacramental Presence in our

tabernacles. 'Wisdom,' says the Holy Scripture, 'hath built herself a house . . . mingled her wine, and set forth her table. . . . Come, eat My bread and drink the wine which I have mingled for you' (Prov. ix. 1, 2, 5).

In the one mystery, in the Incarnation, we see displayed our Lord's infinite goodness in His loving condescension, His works of mercy and beneficence, and in all the details of every period of His life on earth, especially in the doctrine which He has taught us, in the miraculous favours bestowed upon men, and in the sacrifice of His very life on the Cross. His manner of life was well described by St. Peter when he declared that our Lord 'went about doing good' (Acts x. 38). We also see His goodness displayed in a most generous way by His applying to us, and for our benefit, His own infinite merits. In the other mystery, in the Holy Eucharist, we admire this same infinite goodness displayed in wonderful ways in the Holy Mass, in Holy Communion, and in the Divine Presence on our altars. Again and again He renews the sacrifice of Himself, comes into our hearts, and pours out upon us His consolations, so that we may proclaim with the royal prophet: 'He hath not done in like manner to every nation' (Ps. cxlvii. 20).

We will now consider only and in an especial way the Holy Eucharist left to us by our Lord as a loving bequest, and we will take up various thoughts which will help us to realize the greatness of the benefit which it is to us.

What at first strikes us with so much wonder is

our Lord's continual dwelling with us. His Presence amongst us in this mystery under the Eucharistic veils seems even more marvellous than His Presence on earth in the golden age of the accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation, of which the Holy Eucharist is, in a mysterious and mystical way, the perpetuation on earth. How near to us God comes! When Moses was pointing out to the Israelites how favoured they were, he said to them: 'Neither is there any other nation so great that hath gods so nigh them as our God is present to all our petitions' (Deut. iv. 7). If this was true of the Church of the old dispensation, when God listened from over the ark to the prayers of His people, how true we must pronounce it to be now! The prophecies and figures of the former dispensation have been fulfilled, the Orient from on high has visited His people, and now under sacramental veils we have really present in our midst the Lord of glory. We remember how God appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and how the bush was on fire, but was not burnt (Exod. iii. 2). A like wonder is now witnessed by us in the Blessed Sacrament; for the God of all magnificence and glory is therein present under the veil of lowly elements, and they are not consumed or annihilated. But He is there, and this is a truth which we should ever strive to impress upon our minds, and our familiarity with it ought not to lessen our admiration, gratitude, and love.

It may help us to greater devotion if we reflect upon the condition of our Lord's sacred humanity as communicated to us in these mysteries. We have

our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, not now precisely as He communicated Himself when upon earth at His last supper to His Apostles—for they then received Him sacramentally just as He was there before their eyes, and He had yet to die, to rise again, and to enter into His glory—but we receive Him as He now actually is, namely, in His present glorified state. We should try to realize that in Holy Communion we receive indeed the very same Lord who, as an infant, rested in the lap of Mary and in the arms of Joseph, and who, after the Crucifixion, found His last resting-place in the sepulchre of Joseph of Arimathea, but in a different state of being. In the Blessed Sacrament He is not as He was when exposed to sufferings and persecutions, and for our sakes bearing the form of human infirmity, or as the voluntary victim of God's wrath against sinners; but as He now is in His glorious immortality and heavenly beauty—the present object in heaven of the complacency of His Eternal Father, and of the sublime worship of the Angels and Saints. Conceive, then, the august majesty of the Lord present in the Holy Eucharist; it is that Divine Lord of whom St. Paul says: 'In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporally' (Col. ii. 9). This being so, we cannot but be struck by our Lord's loving condescension to us, as witnessed in the manner of His coming among us and dwelling among us in this Divine Sacrament. We read how, while He was on earth, some persons, notwithstanding His sweetness, clemency, and charity, yet experienced a certain timidity in approaching Him; for Mary Magdalen

cast herself silently at His sacred feet, the woman suffering from a painful ailment stole up to Him amidst the crowd, the centurion held himself unworthy to receive Him within his house, and the ten lepers cried to Him from afar off. But what is the case in the Blessed Sacrament? Even as Moses veiled his countenance to hide the lustrous glory which shone from it when he descended from the mountain, so, too, under the veils of this august Sacrament, does our Lord cover from sight the grandeur and brilliancy of His glorious majesty. Therein He deigns to conceal Himself under elements so simple as not to appal either the tenderest child or the most abashed penitent. Kings and great personages on earth display their majesty and power, but through love of us the King of kings hides all His magnificence.

We may now ask ourselves by what faculty we discern our Lord's Presence in these sacred mysteries. We discern it not by any bodily sense, but by the light of faith Divinely given. Our Lord when on earth was seen by the eyes of the body—by those eyes with which men discern the commonest objects around them, eyes which often fail to discern aright, and which are destined to be one day sightless, since they, too, must at death, like the other members of the body, pay their debt to corruption. Among the many who saw and heard our Lord when on earth, there were some who did so without discernment; they had not faith. Of them He said: 'Seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand' (St. Matt. xiii. 13). But now we discern our

Lord present in the Holy Eucharist, not by this ordinary and faulty faculty of vision, but by the eyes of the soul, by the sublime light of an infallible faith. 'Blessed,' said our Lord, 'are the eyes that see the things which you see.' How grand the objects which this faith reveals to us! Many, alas! have no faith. How many there are to whom these sacred mysteries of God's love are as a sealed book! How many, too, there are who believe, but who yet act as if they had no faith! Not so you; yours is a keen and practical faith. 'Blessed,' again said our Lord, 'are they who have not seen' (that is, with the eyes of the body), 'but have believed.'

There are some circumstances in connection with our Lord's Presence in the Blessed Sacrament which are especially consoling. How truly is fulfilled therein His promise, 'Behold, I am with you all days'! When on earth, He was not to be seen at all times. The greater part of His admirable life was spent in seclusion, and even during His missionary work He frequently retired into hilly and lonely places; but now, in this Holy Sacrament, He is present with us day and night, and He may be found at all times. On earth, too, during those few years which He devoted to preaching, He had no fixed abode. His first disciples asked Him: 'Master, where dwellest Thou?' (St. John i. 38); and He replied: 'Come and see.' But at another time He had no abode, and He said: 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head' (St. Matt. viii. 20). What a consolation, however, is afforded us, seeing that in the

Holy Sacrament our Lord has established a fixed abode among us! God said of old to His chosen people: 'I will set My tabernacle in the midst of you' (Lev. xxvi. 11). How fully this promise is realized in the Church! We know where the tabernacle is; there we may find our Lord at all times. Before it we may unburden the sorrows of our heart: 'Come to Me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you' (St. Matt. xi. 28). There we may seek enlightenment and counsel: 'Come ye to Him and be enlightened' (Ps. xxxiii. 6). There, too, we may pray for grace, strength, and blessing: 'Ask, and you shall receive.' Then, for our spiritual refection, we may partake of the Holy Eucharist, therein to be united to our Lord and be fed by Him: 'If any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever; and the Bread that I will give is My Flesh, for the life of the world' (St. John vi. 52).

Unmistakably we witness in the Holy Eucharist a marvellous condescension, a deep but consoling mystery, and a loving proof of God's good-will towards us. We therefore expect wonderful benefits to result from it; we shall not be disappointed. Through it our Lord draws our soul to Himself, and satisfies its many needs.

It may be said that the Holy Eucharist is the centre of worship and attraction in the Church. By this great Sacrament our Lord seeks to draw our soul to Himself. Deep as is the mystery, and awe-inspiring as is the Real Presence, He wishes not to repel, but to attract us; we are to put aside fear. Who should fear, when the tenderest of lords, One who is the

all-powerful Victor over sin and the devil, is with His people? When He walked upon the sea, and the disciples cried out with fear, He said: 'Be of good heart; it is I, fear ye not' (St. Matt. xiv. 27). When He stood suddenly in the midst of His disciples after His resurrection, and they were 'troubled and affrighted,' He addressed them, saying: 'Peace be to you; it is I, fear not' (St. Luke xxiv. 36). From the most Holy Sacrament, in the stillness of the Eucharistic Presence, we seem to receive the same reassurance: our Lord is there for our sakes, to console us, to bid us be of good heart, and to impart to us His peace. We may be sure that He does not wish to repel us, when we consider how familiar to us He has made the renewal of these sacred mysteries; it is daily and everywhere. Consider, too, the humble elements of bread and wine under which He veils His presence; and consider, further, that, not content with seeking to make us partake of these mysteries by employing loving invitations, He proceeds even to use threats, fearing we might neglect to use the heavenly food. With what earnest words He addresses us: 'Amen, amen, I say unto you: Except you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you' (St. John vi. 54). But nowhere are we repelled by Him.

You, O religious, may take to yourselves the loving and pressing invitations which are expressed by the following texts of Holy Scripture: 'Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, My dearly beloved' (Cant. v. 1); 'Come, eat My Bread, and drink the Wine which I have mingled for you' (Prov. ix. 5);

'You shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour's fountains' (Isa. xii. 3); 'All you that thirst, come to the waters' (Isa. lv. 1); 'Hearken diligently to Me, and eat that which is good, and your soul shall be delighted' (Isa. lv. 2); 'Take ye and eat: This is My Body' (St. Matt. xxvi. 26). O Divine condescension! O unparalleled love! Do you not, O religious, feel drawn to these heavenly mysteries?

In the Holy Eucharist our Lord not only draws you to Himself; He also satisfies your soul's many needs. Through this Sacrament, to use the words of David, 'the Lord satisfieth thy desire with good things; thy youth shall be renewed like the eagle's' (Ps. cii. 5). When you receive Holy Communion, not only is there effected in your souls an increase of sanctifying grace, but the Holy Sacrament is to you as a spiritual and delicious food, whereby the life and health of your soul are nourished and sustained, and charity is further enkindled and increased. The longer you study the wonders which surround this mystery of mysteries, the deeper are you lost in admiration and surprise. Addressing our Lord, St. Augustine says: 'Thou wilt not change me into Thyself, as though I should become the food of Thy Flesh, but Thou wilt be changed into me.'* This statement corresponds with our Lord's declaration: 'He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me' (St. John vi. 58). We are nourished by Him, not He by us. You see how in this wonderful Sacrament our Lord becomes more than a friend; He becomes

* 'Nec Tu me mutabis in Te sicut cibum Carnis Tuæ, sed Tu mutaberis in me.'—Confess., lib. vii., cap. 10.

even the Divine food of your souls—your 'super-substantial bread.' Not content with only drawing you to Himself by the operations of His grace—that is, with drawing you from what is vain and useless to what is holy and profitable, from what is of nature to supernatural virtue and heavenly desires, and from tepidity to fervour—He in the Holy Eucharist also communicates Himself to you to lift you up to an everlasting union with Himself, and He bestows upon you rich graces to adorn your soul, and to make it worthy of this union: 'He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, abideth in Me, and I in him' (St. John vi. 57). He becomes the Source of your strength, your joy, and your consolation. He heals your soul's infirmities, He helps you to overcome your spiritual enemies, He imparts to you His peace, He enables you to persevere in a holy life, He purifies your affections, and He soothes your sorrows. Ask the regular and fervent communicant what a blessing Holy Communion is. He might sum up his experience, using the words of David: 'My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God' (Ps. lxxxiii. 3).

Alas that the rich blessings of the Holy Eucharist are not prized or in the least regarded by so many men! Men's souls are weak, yet food is at hand; they are cold, yet here is the fire; they thirst, yet here is the fountain; they desire riches, and here is a treasure beyond all other treasures. Why then this disregard? Because they have not faith and piety, because they love the world, because they are enslaved by what is evil, or because they are carnal and neglectful of

spiritual blessings. How lamentable is their condition! In the miserable plight in which men are owing to their sin, their weakness, and the dangers to which they are exposed, they cannot dispense with the Divine Sacrament. What would be your feelings, O religious, if you were deprived of it? Can you conceive a greater deprivation? It would be to take away your most valuable treasure, and to inflict a deep wound upon your heart, for our Lord says: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (St. Luke xii. 34). You would lose the Divine Friend who consoles you by His Sacramental Presence, the adorable Victim who offers Himself daily in sacrifice in your behalf, the Fountain of Living Water which refreshes you, and the Bread of Life which sustains you. 'Depart not, O Lord, from us,' you would cry out with deep emotion. 'To whom should we then turn?' Thank God such a cruel trial does not await you. Listen to our Lord's consoling assurance: 'I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you' (St. John xiv. 18). 'Behold, I am with you all days.'

These considerations should impress your minds with reverent and loving regard for our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, and with sincere gratitude for so magnificent and valuable an institution. See, then, before you close your retreat, what your conduct is in regard to the Blessed Sacrament. At Holy Mass, at Holy Communion, at Benediction, and when before the tabernacle, do you manifest a lively faith, earnest reverence, a sense of humility, and a spirit of fervent piety? Do you at all times aim at

innocence of life and fidelity to duty in order to keep yourselves disposed to assist day after day at the Holy Sacrifice, and to receive, as your rule requires, the Blessed Sacrament several times every week? How great is the honour which you thus enjoy! When Miphiboseth, the son of Saul, was called to sit at King David's table, he expressed his sense of his unworthiness of this honour, saying: 'All of my father's house were no better than worthy of death . . . and thou hast set me thy servant among the guests of thy table' (2 Kings xix. 28). The King of kings, in His love for you and desire of your sanctification, brings you to His own table, and feeds you with His Body and Blood. Bring, then, to this Divine Sacrament the most fervent and becoming dispositions. With the eye of a lively faith look through the veils which now shroud the Presence of your Lord, with jubilant voice proclaim your praise, and let the fragrant incense of your love ascend before His lowly throne. Beseech Him to rule you, and to lead you, by the graces which flow from the Holy Eucharist, 'to the fountains of the waters of life.' In your Communions receive reverently and devoutly the Bread of Life, that every Communion may increase your charity, inspire you with fresh energy in the service of God, and give courage and firmness to your steps in that holy path which leads to eternal life.

## XXII.

### *RECOURSE TO MARY.*

'Thou hast found grace with God.'—ST. LUKE i. 30.

BEFORE we close the retreat I invite you to turn with loving devotion to Mary, your heavenly Mother —turn to her not only because you wish her to bless the fruits of the retreat, but also because you would beseech her to aid you at all times by her powerful intercession. Our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII., urges you to seek the aid of Mary's intercession in one of his encyclical letters, in which, speaking of the Blessed Virgin, he says: 'Such is her greatness, and such her favour with God, that he who, needing help, neglects to have recourse to her is as one who would fly without the aid of wings.' The Holy Father, in the same letter, suggests four motives which should inspire you with confidence in invoking Mary's assistance. He says: 'Which of all those that inhabit the regions of glory can rival in favour the august Mother of God? To whom is vouchsafed a clearer intuition in the Eternal Word of our needs and difficulties? Who has greater influence to move the Divine will? And who can compare

with her in motherly affection?' (Encycl. of September 12, 1897).

Your own piety, which dates from your tenderest years—a grace bestowed upon you by the Holy Spirit of God and nurtured by religion—has drawn you to love and honour Mary, and to have constant recourse to her powerful help. You will not now become lax in your devotion to Mary, but you wish rather to be even more earnest in cultivating it and displaying it, as well to show your gratitude for all the blessings which have resulted from it, as to manifest your earnest faith in its admirable and consoling efficacy. Such is the nature of this piety, that you feel that, just as there would be something wanting to the integrity of your faith if the calling, position, dignity, and privileges of Mary were lost sight of and formed no object of your belief, so, too, your piety would be incomplete in its character, scope, and practice if devotion to Mary had no place in it.

Holy Church—ever proclaiming to you and reminding you of our Lord's Incarnation by her annual seasons and festivals, by the preaching of her ministers, and by the Crucifix and statues which she puts before your eyes—not only keeps alive your belief that God verily became man, but also this other belief, intimately and inseparably connected with the Incarnation, that Mary was His Mother. Therefore does Holy Church, in her wise distribution of the festivals of the year, introduce from time to time feasts in honour of the ever-blessed Mother of God to teach her children to love and reverence Mary, and to have recourse to her intercession.

Especially are religious inspired with feelings of tenderness and confidence in their relations with our Blessed Lady, and perhaps more than others do they in their piety have recourse to her at all times. You run to her with your petitions because, as the Angel Gabriel assured Mary herself, she has 'found grace with God.' It seemed good to the all-wise and beneficent God that His Son should be born of a virgin, and the virgin elected to be the mother was Mary. Whatever else, then, men may wish to say in praise of Mary, or whatever, through indifference or disrespect towards her, they may wish to pass over and ignore, this truth will yet ever stand out in glorious relief, namely, that God chose Mary to be the Mother of His only-begotten Son. It is therefore only to be expected that God, in whose eyes she has found such favour, will show special favour to her prayers. If He manifested His predilection in designing Mary from all eternity for so exalted and unique a dignity and calling, if He in due time became Himself the Author of all that we admire and honour in her—her being, her graces, and her sanctity, also her immaculate conception and virginal maternity, and all her other privileges —and, finally, the Author of her marvellous grandeur and incomparable glory, making her by far excel in grace, comeliness, and dignity all the Angels and Saints, should it be matter for surprise that, seeing how greatly God has thus exalted Mary, you are inspired with the most lively confidence in the power of her intercession, and that you rightly believe her pleading with her Divine Son to be all-powerful?

Consider, too, that her holiness as well as her exaltedness adds to her intercessory power. If, as David says, 'the eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and His ears unto their prayers' (Ps. xxxiii. 16), how confidently you hope to receive help through the prayers of Mary, who exceeds all creatures in justice, having been endowed with surpassing sanctity as the Mother of Christ! As His Mother she caressed Him, and was caressed by Him; she spent much of her life with Him. She brought Him up and worked for Him; she clung to Him in life and at death; and she was the object of Christ's tenderest affection, which she could even claim by right, because she was His Mother. She would have been sanctified by her continual communication with Him, but Mary's sanctification was of a more intimate and necessary kind than such accidental sanctity, for to her was said by the Angel: 'Hail, full of grace.' It was that untold measure of grace and holiness which, by God's eternal decree, should adorn and intimately sanctify her who was to be the Mother of His beloved Son. And this of very necessity was so, in order that no possible reproach could be cast upon God that, in decreeing the Incarnation, He should not have prepared a Mother worthy of His Son—an impossibility which could not be entertained without blasphemy—and that no reflection should fall upon the Son that the Mother who bore Him should not have been worthy of Him, or that one more worthy could have been found or created. We do not wish to exaggerate in the least Mary's virtue and grace—we do not know

how great they are—but since we are constrained to admit that God made her worthy to be the Mother of His Son, how inconceivably great we must acknowledge them to be! They are the measure of her justice, and her justice is one of the measures of the efficacy of her intercession.

Let us now make a few reflections upon Mary's special place in the Divine plans, and therefore her special claim to our honour and confidence, as the Mother of our Blessed Redeemer. How incomparable this dignity! How beloved it makes Mary by God, and how revered by men! In reflecting upon her dignity, you call to mind how it was in the hour of man's direst need that God gave him comfort by the promise of Mary and Mary's Son. In the very first mention in the Holy Scriptures of our Lord as man's Redeemer, He is spoken of as the seed of the woman (Gen. iii. 15); He was therefore to be born of a woman—the woman was Mary. How great, noble and honourable should that Mother be who should bring forth into the world the only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, sent to save mankind from His wrath! How incomparably more excellent than the first Eve should be that blessed Eve through whose Son the sin of the first was to be atoned for! How much more exalted was the calling of Mary, the Mother of the world's Redeemer, than that of Eve, the mother of the fallen race which needed redemption! You call, then, to mind with exultation and confidence, when you have recourse to Mary, all her excellences and all her glories. You proclaim her more prudent than Eve,

more courageous than Judith, more beautiful than Esther; you recognise her as the incomparable Mother of Him of whom Abel the just, Isaac the most dutiful of sons, Josue the most valiant of conquerors, and Solomon the wisest of kings, were but humble types and lowly foreshadowings. You call to mind how wonderful Mary's Divine maternity was, for of her it was foretold: 'Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel' (Isa. vii. 14); and how not her maternity alone, but everything concerning her, was of a special character; how Divine favours had preceded her in God's designs, and in her pedigree, for her parents were great Saints; and how exceptional graces were poured upon her in her conception, in her nativity, in her early life, in her admirable espousals, in her incomparable calling, and in her sinlessness and sanctity, and finally in her death, in her assumption, and in her glory. You take delight in recalling how Holy Church applies to Mary what is written in the Canticle of Canticles; that she is the most beautiful among women, all fair and without spot, the one chosen one of the heavenly Spouse, the lily among thorns; and how the glorious Angel declared to Mary that she was 'full of grace,' that the Lord was with her, that she was blessed among women, and that she had found grace with God. You therefore contemplate her as the Mother of God, raised to a transcendent dignity, and adorned with the sublimest gifts of nature and of grace. But in all this you recognise that Mary's excellences have special relation to her Divine Son.

Mary's Divine Son declares of Himself, by the mouth of Solomon: 'I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys' (Cant. ii. 11); how rich and fertile must that field have been out of which sprung up this beautiful and fragrant flower!—that field was Mary. In the same sense Isaias prophesied: 'There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root' (xi. 1); how noble and excellent the root of Jesse out of which this rod and this flower were to spring!—that noble root of Jesse was Mary. Balaam had, before this, prophesied of our Lord's coming, saying: 'A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel' (Num. xxiv. 17); how beautiful and serene the sky from out of whose bosom that bright star should shine!—again, it was Mary. Of Mary's Divine Son it is written in Isaias: 'Behold, I will lay a stone in the foundations of Sion, a tried stone, a corner-stone, a precious stone, founded in the foundation' (xxviii. 16); how pure, firm and worthy in every respect should be the foundation upon which should be laid that precious stone!—that fair foundation was Mary.

Other references to Mary in Holy Writ, especially those which prove the honour due to her, also inspire you with confidence in having recourse to her. For instance, there is the scene upon the occasion of the Visitation. Elizabeth, venerable and revered, receives Mary with all possible honour and respect, crying out with a loud voice and saying: 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb; whence is this to me that the Mother of

my Lord should come to me? blessed art thou because thou hast believed.' You also hear Mary herself, filled with the Holy Ghost, proclaiming: 'Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed; because He that is mighty hath done great things to me.' Then there is the scene at the ceremony of the Purification. Holy Simeon foretells that Mary will be the object of the devotion and love of many hearts, when he says to her: 'Thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed.' At another time Mary's praises are proclaimed by a woman in a crowd who lifts up her voice, saying to our Lord: 'Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the paps that gave Thee suck' (St. Luke xi. 27). Thank God for having left in Holy Writ so many passages to inspire you with reverence and admiration in your devotion to Mary, and with confidence in the power of her intercession, because she has 'found grace with God.' She has found greater favour with Him than all other creatures, and her prayers will therefore plead more favourably for you than the prayers of all others.

We have considered that, in having recourse to Mary, you are confident in the efficacy of her intercession, because of her exaltedness and her holiness; and we have seen Mary's title to your honour and confidence on account of her dignity as Mother of our Blessed Redeemer; come now to consider that you should at all times have recourse to her, because she is man's advocate with her Divine Son, and because she is your heavenly Mother.

There is absolutely only one Mediator between

God and man, through whose infinite merits reconciliation has been effected, and through whom every grace and blessing come: this only Mediator is Jesus Christ. But you are not denied the benefit of many pleaders in your behalf, through whose prayers the favours of mercy, grace, and all blessings may be obtained, and whose prayers are more acceptable to God than your own. These pleaders are the Blessed in heaven, the holy souls in purgatory, and the just on earth; but among and above all others is Mary. How many men in every age of the Church owe to Mary's intercession graces and mercies without which they would have been lost! St. Anselm and others say that often the compassion of the Mother frees those who might be condemned by the justice of the son.* St. Anselm also says that our Lord, being the Judge of all and the Discerner of the deserts of everyone, rightly does not at once grant the petitions of a man who pleads in his own name; but if appealed to in His Mother's name, He will, through her interceding merits, give a favourable hearing, even though the petitioner, of his own merits, is unworthy of being heard.† Mary's office as man's advocate is to win the conversion of sinners and of the negligent, that they may seek from her Divine Son the mercy and grace which they need for their salvation; to move her Son by her own touching

* 'Quos sæpe justitia Filii damnare potest, Matris misericordia liberat.'

† 'Invocato autem nomine Matris, etsi merita invocantis non merentur ut audiatur, merita tamen Matris intercedunt ut exaudiatur.'—ST. ANSELM.

supplications, when their prayers are unworthy of a hearing; to watch over, and advance by her patronage, the spiritual and temporal interests of her devout clients; to win for her clients richer favours than their own merits could lead them to expect; to obtain for them special protection against their spiritual enemies; and to assist them by her prayers at all times during life, and especially at its momentous close. Her Divine Son's office is one of justice as well as of mercy, for He is man's Saviour, and He is appointed to be the Judge of all; but Mary's is an office of beneficence and mercy only. Therefore have men in every age of the Church had recourse to her, to beseech her to use her advocacy in their behalf. They have been instigated and encouraged by the Church, which has ever fostered this spirit of piety. Her holiest and most learned men have practised this devotion to Mary; her Pontiffs have promoted it; her Doctors have promulgated and defended it; her Saints have preached it; all the faithful have loved it. Only the darkness of unbelief and the blight of heresy have sought to withstand it. Who shall say what a blessing recourse to Mary as man's advocate with the Son has been? Who shall tell us how many it has helped to sanctify and to save,* or how many sinners it has been the means of converting? Recourse to Mary as a display of practical devotion to her, and of confidence in her intercession, comes down to you with the sanction

* 'Semper hæc (Maria) inveniet gratiam, et sola est gratia qua egemus: nimirum sola est gratia qua salvamur.' — ST. BERNARD.

of ages, and with a history of enthusiasm on the part of the faithful, which cannot but recommend it to you, and which should lead you to practise it zealously and constantly.

Mary is your advocate as the Mother of our Lord, and as the Queen of Heaven; the King's Mother pleads for the servants of the King, and the Queen for her subjects. When Mary prays, it is to her own Son she addresses herself; she knows the tenderness of her Son's Sacred Heart for herself and for those for whom she prays, and she knows her claims upon her Son. What incalculable power, then, there must be in her intercession! He is the best of sons, she the truest of mothers; and even on earth where shall we find a man who is deaf to the righteous entreaties of his mother? What, then, may you not expect, if only you touch Mary's sympathetic heart and win her interest? Her Divine Son will grant every favour which she asks at His hands.

The Holy Scriptures give us the example of Solomon's consideration for his mother Bethsabee. When Adonias, Solomon's half-brother who had sought to obtain the sovereignty, wished a favour from the king, he presented himself before Bethsabee, saying: 'I pray thee speak to King Solomon, for he cannot deny thee anything.' When Bethsabee went in before Solomon, the king, her son rose to meet her, and bowed to her. 'And a throne was set for the king's mother, and she sat on his right hand. And she said to him: I desire one small petition of thee, do not put me to confusion. And the king said to her: My mother, ask; for I

must not turn away thy face' (3 Kings ii. 17-20). Well said, O king; but the petition was not worthy of being granted. But Mary is more than a Bethsabee, and Jesus more than a Solomon—as He said of Himself: 'Behold more than Solomon here' (St. Luke xi. 31). If our Lord has said to all, even to the least of His followers, 'Ask, and ye shall receive,' shall not His own beloved Mother upon asking receive? Remember, then, always that your advocate with our Lord is even His own Mother, whose petitions He will not disregard.

Your advocate is also Queen of Heaven. How special and consoling are the prerogatives which are enjoyed by a queen! When the king will not listen to the petitions presented to him by his subjects, nor heed the entreaties of his favourite minister, he may be approached by his queen and be conciliated by her. History furnishes examples of this. Will, then, the Sacred Heart of Jesus be hardened so as not to regard the pleadings of Mary, Queen of Heaven? When Esther entered into the royal presence to petition Assuerus for her people, the king extended his sceptre, and said to her: 'What wilt thou, Queen Esther? What is thy request? if thou shouldst even ask one half of the kingdom, it shall be given to thee' (Esth. v. 3). Mary is more than an Esther. Another instance of royal clemency being accorded upon a queen's entreaties was witnessed when, after the siege of Calais, six of the chief citizens of that town presented themselves before Edward III. to appeal for mercy for the rest of the citizens. Edward would not listen, and he

ordered their execution. His barons pleaded in vain; but the king yielded to the tears and entreaties of Philippa, his queen, and pardoned and spared all the citizens. Mary is more than a Philippa. In her are greater graces and more tender compassion than in any earthly queen. Her adornment is not that of precious robes of earthly texture, or of jewels of earthly lustre; she is not as queens of this world. Who shall describe her heavenly beauty and glory? Who shall tell us of the benignity and clemency of her gentle sway, or the power of her queenly intercession? What a consolation, then, it should be to you to know that you have in heaven such an advocate to plead your cause, and to obtain for you in your various needs grace, support, and consolation!

Consider, lastly, that you should have recourse to Mary because she is your own heavenly Mother. With what confidence the very title should inspire you! Learn from the Saints to call upon her not only reverently, but also lovingly: this is one of the ways in which she wishes to be honoured. As children run to their earthly mother to confide to her their joys and their sorrows, and to seek help and protection, counsel and consolation, so should you in the same way, only with greater confidence, have recourse to your heavenly Mother. Think you hear our Lord from the Cross saying to you as He said to St. John: 'Behold thy Mother.' This dying bequest was for all His followers: our Lord made His Mother yours also. Honour her and trust her as such. When the aged Tobias felt that his days

on earth were numbered, he called his son to him, and said: 'When God shall take my soul, thou shalt bury my body; and thou shalt honour thy mother all the days of her life' (Tob. iv. 3). Be not less zealous in honouring Mary, bequeathed to you by your dying Saviour, than was young Tobias in honouring his earthly mother thus so tenderly committed to his care by his dying father. God commands you to honour her when He says: 'Honour thy father and thy mother.' If you do not confide in Mary, if you do not address yourselves to her, if you do not have recourse to her, you do not honour her. Lift up, then, constantly and lovingly your mind and heart and voice to Mary, your heavenly protectress and advocate; she is your Mother.

I have striven by these considerations to impress upon your minds a lively sense of how great a blessing recourse to Mary should be to you. Already do you run to her with your petitions, and confide in her protection; but do not deem that time misspent in which you dwell in your minds upon the many and various motives which should inspire you with confidence in the intercession of your heavenly Mother. Devotion to her is not built upon a fanciful foundation, but upon the solid foundation of doctrine which is irrefragable, being Scriptural and theological as well as pious and consoling, and the better it is understood the more firmly the devout mind embraces it, appreciates it, and puts in practice what it inculcates.

Turn, then, once more with renewed fervour and fidelity to Mary, your heavenly Mother, advocate

and protectress. Do not underrate devotion to her, or the need you have of her intercession. Rejoice that Mary has found such grace with God, and on this account love and revere her. Show special devotion to her on her festivals; commend to her yourselves and your works; have recourse to her in your temptations, difficulties, and sorrows; confide in her and multiply your prayers to her. Beseech her to obtain for you also the grace to find favour with God. What should you seek more earnestly than this? Be not like some unspiritual seculars whose chief concern would seem to be to stand well in the eyes of men, to be deemed by men of good family, estimable, polished, accomplished, distinguished, or wealthy, but who neglect prayer, devotion, and the reception of the holy Sacraments, the works of charity and mercy, and the practice of meekness, self-denial, humility, and other virtues which would make them pleasing to God. Beg of Our Lady to obtain for you by her prayers that, in mind and heart and life, you may ever be pleasing in the eyes of God, and that by your thoughts, affections, desires, words, and actions you may ever give glory to Him. What does your heavenly Mother desire of you but this? Let her beautiful example lead you onwards in the path of your sanctification, and as your own prayers and merits are so inefficacious, beseech her to use her powerful intercession in your behalf to obtain for you the grace to rise from all tepidity and negligence, to correct your failings and imperfections, and to aim at greater assiduity in fulfilling the duties of your holy calling,

that thus you, like herself, may find grace with God, and may be more worthy of the blessing of her Divine Son, and of her own love, protection, and patronage. Aided by her prayers, may you, in your future life, remain ever faithful to grace, and may you pass safely through all the dangers from without and from within to which you may be exposed, until, having passed from this scene of your labours and sorrows, you behold your heavenly Mother in her blessedness and glory in the kingdom of her Son.

## CLOSE OF THE RETREAT.

### XXIII.

*PERSEVERANCE.*

'Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto life everlasting.'—ST. JUDE i. 21.

You should feel happy at the close of the retreat in the consolation which it has brought to you. You have during it been often in spirit face to face with God and with your own soul. From God you have sought light and guidance—the light of instruction and understanding, and the guidance of the inspirations of grace; in your soul you have sought out its defects, and noted its insincerity and inconstancy. You have been in earnest: there has been compunction, and this has led to amendment; you have desired knowledge, and this has placed you on a more perfect way; you have detected dangers, and this has convinced you of the necessity of taking precautions; you have had to acknowledge weakness, and this has made you turn to the sources of strength; you have felt the attraction to dutifulness and piety,

and this has inspired you with determination to persevere with greater fidelity in the path of your vocation. Thank God, then, for these consoling results, which are the fruits of the grace of the retreat. May these fruits remain!

It is not enough to be momentarily impressed by the various effects of the retreat upon your mind, heart, and life; you wish to persevere in fervour, you wish to continue to please God till the very end of your lives, you wish to secure the heavenly reward. 'Keep yourselves,' St. Jude says, 'in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto life everlasting.' Strive, then, to urge yourselves to correspond with the grace of the retreat. Although the special sense of consolation peculiar to these days of retirement may not continue to be experienced when you are fully taken up again with your usual employments, let there yet remain with you the remembrance of the lessons which you have learned, and the determination to put them into practice. The test of sincerity, of virtue, of dutifulness, is perseverance, as it is also the condition on which depends the receiving of the heavenly reward, as we learn by the message which our Lord sent to the Bishop of Smyrna: 'Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life' (Apoc. ii. 10); and by our Lord's words at another time: 'He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved' (St. Matt. x. 22).

You should be filled with the hope of persevering when you reflect that God has espoused your souls to Himself in the nuptials of grace. Although by

faults of frailty you may at times displease your heavenly Spouse, and lessen the favours which He showers upon you, these spiritual espousals will not be dissolved except by the commission of mortal sin. The words of the prophecy in which Christ's espousal of His Church is foretold bear application also to His espousal of the Christian soul by grace: 'I will espouse thee to Me for ever, and I will espouse thee to Me in justice, and judgment, and in mercy, and in commiserations' (Osee ii. 19). If the bond be broken, it will be against His will; it will be by your infidelity. Reflect also that it is by a wonderful condescension that God comes down, so to say, to the human soul, and raises it up to union with Himself' (St. John xiv. 23; 2 St. Pet. i. 4); and that He does not raise it up to cast it down, but He raises it to a union which He wishes to be permanent. He deigns to say to the soul, 'Abide in My love' (St. John xv. 9). You have, then, the consolation of knowing that God desires your perseverance in grace, and that He will therefore sustain you and aid you to persevere.

You yourselves wish to persevere, you wish to reach the goal. It is not enough to take some steps towards it, you must go the whole way; you must continue your efforts to reach it, and overcome the obstacles which may lie in your way to it. As St. Paul says: 'So run that you may obtain (the prize); and every one that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself from all things; and they indeed (who run in a race) that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one'

(1 Cor. ix. 24, 25). You wish that God's designs in you may reach their final accomplishment; for this desirable consummation your perseverance is necessary.

We will consider that, to ensure perseverance, you must not desist from corresponding with grace, from bearing the yoke of religion, from maintaining a well-regulated interior spirit, or from keeping up the warfare with the enemies of your sanctification; and finally we will consider in what spirit you should strive to persevere.

When we say that you must not cease to correspond with grace, we mean especially two things, namely: that you must not cast away grace by mortal sin, and that you must strive ever to avail yourselves of the many means of obtaining God's grace. If you are earnest in both these respects, it will result that you will, with more or less fidelity, usually follow the movements of grace. You may not expect to be so perfect as always and in all things to correspond fully with grace, and so be free from all fault or unfaithfulness, for St. James says, 'In many things we all offend' (iii. 2); but you may trust that the result of your conduct will be that in all important matters grace will sustain you, and that you will be sensitive regarding moral evil, not only so as to be determined never to commit mortal sin, but also so as to wish to please God in all things. When it is laid down that you should, on the one hand, never consent to mortal sin, it is understood that no exception can be entertained, that you must hate sincerely so great an evil, and that you must be careful to avoid, as far as you can, every danger of

committing mortal sin. When it is laid down, on the other hand, that you should strive to avail yourselves of the many means of obtaining grace, it is not expected that you should fatigue and disturb yourselves by seeking every possible means of doing so, but that you should avail yourselves of those means which devout persons in the same calling as yourselves employ, and of any others which you may feel specially drawn to use. If, then, you resist evil, and seek God's grace with continued assiduity, you may be confident of ever receiving the guidance and support of grace; as St. Peter says, 'The God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, will Himself perfect you, and confirm you, and establish you' (1 St. Pet. v. 10). This is a promise of perseverance. There must not, then, be any voluntary return to those ways which you know to have been in the past the cause of faultiness, and at the same time of serious spiritual detriment; nor must you again fall into those habits of neglect by which you deprived your soul of many graces, with the result of callousness in your service of God, loss of merit, and a sad deterioration in your conscientiousness. Be persuaded that every voluntary fault of commission or omission, being in opposition to grace, cannot but prove an evil to yourselves, and that it will also raise an obstacle to your perseverance; while every effort made, and every means employed, with a view to obtain grace or an increase of grace, will prove an inestimable blessing, and will be also a help to your perseverance.

In the second place, there must not be any faltering under the sweet yoke of religion. When God has given a vocation to a special state of life, it must be followed; when you have begun to follow it, you must not desist from doing so. To cease to follow your vocation would be a grave act of infidelity; and if, in acting thus, you were also guilty of violating your vows, such violation would be sacrilegious. To the unfaithful religious may be addressed our Lord's words: 'No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God' (St. Luke ix. 62). It should then be evident that, to insure perseverance in the path of your sanctification and salvation, you must also persevere in the path of your religious calling. What, however, is meant by this? Evidently that you should persevere in fidelity to the obligations of your calling. It cannot be supposed to mean that you insure your perseverance by living unreligiously, remissly, unfaithfully, unobservantly. If you wish God to be generous with you, the least you can do is to be faithful in fulfilling your religious obligations—they are a holy discipline by which your souls are weaned from their spiritual infirmities and from inordinate affections, and strengthened in what is wise and good. Of such a discipline the holy writer says: 'Submit your neck to the yoke, and let your soul receive discipline. . . . Receive ye discipline as a great sum of money' (Ecclus. li. 34, 36). To insure perseverance, you will not be content with fulfilling only the essential obligations of your state; you will carry your observance in a spirit of devotedness to the minor

obligations. You will strive to do what you yourselves would conscientiously advise others to do, if they were to ask you how they should prove themselves to be good religious — 'good and faithful servants' (St. Matt. xxv. 21). You will strive to fulfil your obligations in the manner in which you will, when you come to die, wish that you had fulfilled them. A dutiful, observant religious in acting in this manner will certainly dispose herself to persevere, because she will thus seek only to do God's holy will, and by her constant self-sacrifice she will multiply her merits. Her conduct will be very different from that of religious who hold themselves bound only to avoid committing sin—and in this purpose even they are most likely often to fail: who are so little in earnest about tending to perfection that they seldom reflect upon what this duty demands of them; and who have no zeal for that exact and edifying conduct by which they offer to God the fragrant worship of a devoted service. Such religious may yet be in the way leading to the goal of their hopes; but it would not be well to take them as guides, for their steps will be faltering and their falls many. Alas, that at times religious are to be met with—but such cases are very rare—who are aiming wide of the mark, and who have misgivings about themselves! You will not encounter such as these, and you are not likely to take the direction which they are pursuing. Aided by grace you will continue to bear the yoke of religion dutifully and piously, thus to strengthen your hope of persevering until you reach the reward of your sacrifice.

You will, in the third place, strive to insure perseverance by maintaining a well-regulated interior spirit. You must follow the supernatural guidance of faith, and act from motives of virtue and duty. This interior spirit is as the guard placed over the movements of the soul: it will regulate your general and particular intentions. Your general intention—which you should renew from time to time, and which you should take care never to withdraw or displace in favour of any unworthy intention—should be to please and honour God in all you do. This meritorious intention will give a general direction of your life to the service of God in the sphere in which He has placed you. You should maintain it even though, through frailty, various actions may be vitiated by a particular intention which may be faulty. Your particular intention in every purpose and undertaking, work and action, should be the same general intention applied to the particular act, and also the good which this particular act has in view—such as the good of religion, charity, obedience, or the practice of other virtues. You could not be said to maintain a well-regulated interior spirit if you failed to act from a general good motive, such as I have mentioned; or if you omitted to renew the general good motive from time to time; or, again, if you allowed yourselves to be swayed in your particular actions by unworthy motives — such as uncharitableness, anger, ill-will, pride, vanity, or self-seeking. How sad the case is, when a religious maintains in the exterior a semblance of religiousness, while her interior spirit is worldly, dissipated, self-seeking,

haughty, or otherwise ill-regulated! Such a contradiction will not be maintained long; for, if grace does not work the desirable conversion, the ill-regulated interior will dominate the exterior, and the religious will come to fall away from exterior observance. But how different is the case of a religious who watches well over her interior; who strives to act conscientiously; who purifies such motives as may originally have appeared mixed; and who directs her general and particular conduct by religious intentions! She will persevere in religiousness in her exterior conduct, and the work of her sanctification will be steadily promoted, so as to give hope of her perseverance. 'As for the just,' says David, 'they shall give glory to Thy Name; and the upright shall dwell with Thy countenance' (Ps. cxxxix. 14).

If you wish to insure your perseverance, you must, in the fourth place, keep up the warfare with the enemies of your sanctification. You will not be permitted to reach unmolested the glorious goal of your heavenly calling; enemies will strive to keep you from it. It is therefore necessary that you should be on your guard against them, that you should be prepared for the contest, and that you should maintain the conflict with them unflinchingly, lest they should overcome you. Who and what are the enemies with which you must contend? This question must be answered by every religious for herself. Every religious is conscious of her own weaknesses, and knows the source of them. In some the enemy may be sloth, or envy, or uncharit-

ableness, or pride; in another an inclination to self-indulgence, or an unruly temper, or disdain, or an unwillingness to yield due obedience. The enemy may be the devil with his evil suggestions, or the world with its various seductions. Look back upon the past; have you reason for regret because of one, or two, or more falls, or because of a continuance in unworthy dispositions or conduct? You know the circumstances, the when, where, and how of your regrettable conduct, and you have discerned the cause. You must avoid or remove the cause, lest you fall again. When you repented, your sorrow was great and sincere; you were fully resolved never to expose yourselves to the same falls again. What, however, happened? Did you remain faithful for a while, and then become remiss? If so, the enemy who was lying in wait must have taken advantage of your remissness. Learn, then, a lesson from such experience. The good soldier of Christ, the devout religious, gives the enemy no opportunity, and she offers immediate and continuous resistance to all his advances and assaults, 'whom resist ye, strong in faith,' says St. Peter (1 St. Pet. v. 9). The warfare may be trying, but it is necessary; it is the trial by which is to be tested your worthiness of the promised rewards. If you succumb, you will not be awarded the kingdom; if you only partly succeed, your reward will be less than it would otherwise be. Be earnest, then, in correcting your faults, in opposing and controlling your unruly passions, in resisting the assaults of Satan, and in avoiding and despising whatever temptations the world may suggest, and you will

strengthen your hope of persevering in a devout religious life, and of securing your heavenly crown.

We have now seen that if you continue to try to please God and correspond with His grace, if you are dutiful in bearing the yoke of religion, if you act from religious motives and conscientiously, and if you offer strenuous opposition to the enemies of your sanctification, you thus win for yourselves the consolation of knowing that you are striving to 'keep yourselves in the love of God.' You will also see the wisdom of such conduct by the experience of its fruits, in the solid virtue and fervour in which your souls will be maintained, and in which they will continue to be maintained, while you are 'waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.' You thus build up your hope of perseverance upon a substantial foundation.

It may be useful to consider, finally, in what spirit you should strive to persevere.

You should be animated, in the first place, by a spirit of devotedness to God's cause. Can you conceive how any other spirit less worthy would become the service of God? What excuse could be advanced for offering to God a divided or a half-hearted service? What should be thought of a religious who would think little of God and underrate His claims to her devotedness, but who would be zealous in pleasing the world or in working out her own selfish plans? What should be said of a religious who would find prayer, religious exercises, and all spiritual duties burdensome, and who would seek her pleasure in ease, comforts, relaxation, and

amusements? Our Lord has said: 'God is a Spirit; and they that adore Him, must adore Him in spirit and in truth' (St. John iv. 24). You worship Him and serve Him; there must be a devotedness and fervour in the spirit in which you persevere in doing so. Such a spirit will sustain you under the labours and difficulties of your life, and inspire you with energy and generosity in your service of God. Do not give yourselves to that all-necessary and Divine service with less earnestness than good servants display in the service of an earthly master. God's cause calls for this service of devotedness, because of its supreme excellence in itself, and because of the coldness and indifference of so many who disregard it, and of the rebellion of many more who set themselves in opposition to it. You, at any rate, should prove faithful and self-sacrificing in your devotedness to it, because of its claims upon you, and also in order to make some little amends for the neglect and opposition of others. Strive, then, to animate yourselves with this spirit of devotedness to God's cause.

You should be animated, in the second place, by a spirit of confidence in God's promises. You hope to persevere and to receive the heavenly reward because God has promised it to you, if only, aided by His grace, you fulfil the conditions of obtaining it. You are striving to fulfil the conditions, so you should be buoyed up by a holy trust in God that He will give you the promised reward. Pray, then, with David: 'Uphold me according to Thy word, and I shall live; and let me not be confounded in my expecta-

tion' (Ps. cxviii. 116). This spirit of confidence should lead you to hope that God will maintain you in fervour in pursuing your vocation, and sustain you in the struggles, in the exterior and interior trials, which may be before you in the path of your sanctification. God gives you by His prophet an exhortation which should strengthen you in this spirit: 'Blessed,' says Jeremias, 'be the man that trusteth in the Lord, and the Lord shall be his confidence. And he shall be as a tree that is planted by the waters . . . it shall not fear when the heat cometh . . . neither shall it cease at any time to bring forth fruit' (Jer. xvii. 7, 8). Our Lord came into the world to bring you all the blessings and helps necessary to your sanctification and salvation, and He has promised salvation to His faithful followers (St. Mark xvi. 16; St. John x. 9, etc.). To religious, and to all who have left all things for His sake, He has made special promises (St. Matt. xix. 29). While, then, you strive to correspond with His grace, let a spirit of confidence animate you; it will save you from discouragement or sadness, and will inspire you with piety and fortitude.

Lastly, you should be animated by a spirit of hope and desire of attaining the heavenly reward. Learn a lesson from David; he describes the longings of a faithful soul where he says: 'As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God . . . when shall I come and appear before the face of God?' (Ps. xli. 2, 3). Your years in life are few; only these keep you from the possession of

your reward. They will pass quickly, but the reward will be everlasting. Do you ever think of this blessedness which is to be yours? Do you think of the kingdom glowing with light and glory, in which there will be no place for sadness, weariness, or suffering? Do you think of the overflowing happiness and the peace and repose which will be your portion in that kingdom? Do you think of the companionship of the Blessed Virgin and of all the Angels and Saints? Do you think of the vision of Christ your Saviour, who will crown you as co-heirs with Himself and place you on the everlasting thrones? Do you think of the ineffable delights of possessing God in that intimate manner in which He gives Himself to His elect? (Gen. xv. 1). This reward is a revelation which should urge you onwards with unfaltering steps and with joyful hearts; the consolation which it affords should reconcile you to the cares, labours, and sorrows of life. If the charity of St. Paul led him to endure all things for the sake of the elect, let the desire of your own happiness reconcile you to those crosses which will secure it for you. St. Paul wrote: 'I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. . . . For if we be dead with Him, we shall live also with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him' (2 Tim. ii. 10-12). The thought of the heavenly reward should help you to purify your hearts, and keep them from every unworthy affection; it should also stimulate your dutifulness and devotedness.

You are now at the end of your retreat. Thank

God for the benefit which it has been to your souls. Let the spirit of fervour which animated you during it accompany you when you return to your usual employments. You carry away with you rich fruits; watch over them lest they perish. Your souls are bright and happy; let no evil of deliberate sin tarnish them, and diminish their peace. You look with hope to the horizon of life; let not your gaze be diverted to aims which might darken it. You have studied the ways in which you should walk; do not turn into those which would lead you astray. You have seen by what conduct you should 'make sure your calling and election' (2 St. Pet. i. 10); leave nothing undone to fulfil it. Do not imitate that unfaithful people in whose name Jeremias said in his prayer: 'The crown is fallen from our head: woe to us, because we have sinned' (Lam. v. 16); but strive ever after that 'crown of justice' which our Lord will bestow upon all 'that love His coming' (2 Tim. iv. 8). May special graces be accorded you to enable you to persevere in your present good purposes, and to accomplish day by day, until the end of your lives, what is expected in devout religious. Thus aided and blessed, you will 'keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto life everlasting.'

## LIST OF THE SUBJECTS OF THE CONFERENCES WHICH COMPRISE THE FIRST SERIES.

I. THE RETREAT.*
II. RELIGIOUS PROFESSION.
III. HOLY POVERTY.
IV. SIN IN A RELIGIOUS.
V. MEDITATION.
VI. HOLY CHASTITY.
VII. NEGLECT.
VIII. PURITY OF INTENTION.
IX. HOLY OBEDIENCE.
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XI. OBSERVANCE OF RULE.
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XV. HOLY COMMUNION.
XVI. DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.
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XVIII. HUMAN FRAILTY.
XIX. RECOURSE TO THE SACRED HEART.
XX. CONFIDENCE IN GOD.
XXI. RECOMPENSE.
XXII. LOVE OF GOD.
XXIII. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.

* The subject received a different treatment from that which is found in the second series.

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